

A Multidimensional Investigation of Expulsion and Suspension Practices in Early Childhood  
Programs

By

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## **Abstract**

High rates of expulsion and suspension of young children, especially from childcare programs that are outside of state pre-kindergartens have been documented (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Sharhar, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Although a few studies have identified potential factors associated with the use of exclusionary discipline practices, no study has taken an in-depth, constructive approach. This dissertation applied a mixed-method design to obtain rich, contextual information about early childhood exclusionary discipline practices. Guided by the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and social constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1990), the research questions were designed to consider multi-level factors associated with the use of expulsion and suspension while prioritizing childcare providers' voices and experiences. The study participants included three childcare programs all of which were outside of state pre-kindergarten systems. The primary data collection method was semi-structured interviews with classroom observations and document analysis as the secondary source. Results from thematic analysis demonstrated that the use of expulsion and suspension is affected by childcare providers' perceptions, practices, as well as challenges that they encountered. Specifically, childcare providers tended to hold a deficit view of families and children with challenging behaviors. Classroom practices to address challenging behaviors were often reactive and exclusive instead of proactive or preventative. Challenges faced by childcare providers, such as working with families and lack of workforce competence, contributed to the use of exclusionary practices. Using the study findings, the conceptual framework was revised by including the family as an important part of the microsystem, by emphasizing the interaction between the child with challenging behaviors and others and between the family and the school

as the major parts of the mesosystem, and by expanding the exosystem to include a view of childcare as a profession in the social context.

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## Table of Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Chapter 1 Background and Context -----                               | 1  |
| The Commitment to High Quality Early Care and Education -----        | 1  |
| The Current Status of Child Care Quality -----                       | 3  |
| The Compounding Effects of Expulsion and Suspension -----            | 5  |
| An Urgency to Address Early Childhood Expulsion and Suspension ----- | 7  |
| Statement of the Problem -----                                       | 8  |
| Research Purposes -----  | 11 |
| Research Questions -----   | 11 |
| Chapter 2 Literature Review -----                                    | 13 |
| Current Status of Early Childhood Expulsion and Suspension -----     | 14 |
| Summary and Implications -----                                       | 19 |
| Short and Long Terms Impacts of Expulsion and Suspension -----       | 21 |
| Student and Teacher Safety -----                                     | 22 |
| Climate for Teaching and Learning -----                              | 25 |
| Reduce Probability of Future Occurrence -----                        | 27 |
| Summary and Implications -----                                       | 29 |
| Current Status of Evidence-Based Practices -----                     | 30 |
| Prevention of Challenging Behaviors -----                            | 30 |
| Direct Support for Children’s Challenging Behaviors -----            | 33 |
| Supporting Early Childhood Workforce -----                           | 36 |
| Supporting Collaborative Partnerships with Families -----            | 40 |
| Summary and Implications -----                                       | 42 |



|  |    |
|--|----|
| Why Does Expulsion and Suspension Continue to Occur at High Rates? ----- | 43 |
| Workforce Competence and Support -----                                   | 44 |
| Implicit Bias -----  | 45 |
| Setting Related Factors -----  | 48 |
| Summary and Implications -----   | 51 |
| Conclusions and Implications for the Present Study -----                 | 51 |
| Chapter 3 Methodology -----  | 56 |
| Theoretical and Conceptual Framing -----                                 | 56 |
| Bioecological Theory -----   | 56 |
| Social Constructivism -----  | 58 |
| Conceptual Framework -----   | 59 |
| Key Definitions -----  | 60 |
| Research Design -----  | 61 |
| Sites and Participants -----   | 62 |
| Selection -----  | 62 |
| Recruitment -----  | 64 |
| Participating Sites -----  | 65 |
| Participating Administrators -----                                       | 70 |
| Participating Teachers and Classrooms -----                              | 73 |
| Methodology Tools and Data Collection -----                              | 78 |
| The Researcher as the Primary Research Instrument -----                  | 78 |
| Qualitative Interview -----  | 82 |
| Administrator Interview -----  | 82 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Teacher Interview Round 1 -----                                 | 83  |
| Classroom Observation and Teacher Interview Round 2 -----       | 84  |
| Policy, Regulation, and Behavioral Incident Report -----        | 89  |
| Data Analyses -----   | 90  |
| Unit of Analysis -----  | 91  |
| Qualitative Analysis -----                                      | 92  |
| Descriptive Analysis -----                                      | 93  |
| Data Transformation -----                                       | 96  |
| Data Consolidation -----  | 97  |
| Trustworthiness -----   | 101 |
| Data Triangulation -----  | 101 |
| Investigator Triangulation -----                                | 102 |
| Analytic Memoing -----  | 102 |
| Member Checking -----   | 103 |
| Enhancing the Researcher's Credibility -----                    | 104 |
| Conclusion -----  | 104 |
| Chapter 4 Results -----   | 105 |
| Childcare Providers' Perceptions of Challenging Behaviors ----- | 105 |
| Theme 1: Identifications of Challenging Behavior -----          | 106 |
| Theme 2: Attribution of Challenging Behavior -----              | 108 |
| Family-Related Factors -----                                    | 109 |
| Child-Related Factors -----                                     | 112 |
| Case Difference -----   | 114 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Summary for Research Question 1-----   | 116 |
| Childcare Practices to Address Challenging Behaviors -----                   | 117 |
| Theme 3: Prevention of Challenging Behavior -----                            | 117 |
| Preventative Strategies -----  | 117 |
| Perceived Effectiveness of Prevention -----                                  | 123 |
| Theme 4: Response to Challenging -----                                       | 125 |
| “Talking with the kiddo” -----   | 125 |
| Separation -----   | 126 |
| Involvement of Family -----  | 131 |
| Case Differences -----   | 136 |
| Summary for Research Questions 2 -----                                       | 140 |
| Exclusionary Discipline Practices in Child Care Programs -----               | 140 |
| Theme 5: In-School Suspension -----  | 140 |
| Case Differences -----   | 142 |
| Theme 6: Out-Of-School Suspension -----                                      | 148 |
| Case Differences -----   | 151 |
| Theme 7: Expulsion -----   | 152 |
| Addressing families -----  | 153 |
| “Zero Tolerance” -----   | 155 |
| Policy Versus Practice -----   | 156 |
| Summary for Research Question 3 -----  | 158 |
| Perceived Effectiveness of Exclusionary Discipline Practices (Theme 8) ----- | 159 |
| Protecting the Interests of Other Individuals -----                          | 160 |

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| Addressing Challenging Behaviors -----           | 161 |
| Addressing Families -----                        | 165 |
| Summary for Research Question 4 -----            | 166 |
| Challenges and Needs (Theme 9) -----             | 166 |
| Family as a Challenge -----                      | 167 |
| Workforce Competence as a Challenge -----        | 171 |
| Profession as a Challenge -----                  | 174 |
| Summary for Research Questions 5 and 6 -----     | 177 |
| Chapter 5 Discussion -----                       | 178 |
| Summary of Findings -----                        | 178 |
| Examination of the Conceptual Framework -----    | 182 |
| Microsystems: Family and Program -----           | 184 |
| Mesosystems: Confrontational Relationships ----- | 186 |
| Exosystem: Childcare as a Profession -----       | 190 |
| Summary -----                                    | 193 |
| Strengths and Limitations -----                  | 193 |
| Implications for Future Research -----           | 195 |
| Implications for Practice and Policy -----       | 197 |
| Conclusion -----                                 | 199 |
| References -----                                 | 202 |
| Appendix A: IRB Approval of Protocol -----       | 229 |
| Appendix B: Recruitment Email -----              | 230 |
| Appendix C: Initial Meeting Talking Points ----- | 231 |

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Appendix D: Teacher Recruitment Flier -----                   | 233 |
| Appendix E: Documents to Request -----                        | 234 |
| Appendix F: Administrator Demographic Information Sheet ----- | 235 |
| Appendix G: Administrator Interview Protocol -----            | 236 |
| Appendix H: Teacher Demographic Information Sheet -----       | 238 |
| Appendix I: Teacher Interview Protocol -----                  | 239 |
| Appendix J: An Example of TPOT Report -----                   | 241 |
| Appendix K: TPOT Summative Narratives -----                   | 243 |

## List of Figures

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Figure 1: Steps of Literature Review -----   | 13 |
| Figure 2: Conceptual Framework -----         | 60 |
| Figure 3: Overall Study Design -----         | 62 |
| Figure 4: Data Collection and Analysis ----- | 79 |

## List of Tables

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| Table 1: Participants by Case -----                           | 64  |
| Table 2: Program Demographics -----                           | 66  |
| Table 3: Participant Demographics -----                       | 70  |
| Table 4: Classroom Demographics -----                         | 74  |
| Table 5: TPOT Subscale 1 Key Practices -----                  | 85  |
| Table 6: TPOT Subscale 2 Red Flags -----                      | 86  |
| Table 7: An Example of the TPOT Interview Protocol -----      | 87  |
| Table 8: Documents Received -----                             | 94  |
| Table 9: TPOT Descriptive Scores -----                        | 95  |
| Table 10: Data Matrix -----                                   | 99  |
| Table 11: Program Expulsion Policies -----                    | 157 |
| Table 12: Purposes of Exclusionary Discipline Practices ----- | 160 |
| Table 13: Consolidation of All Findings -----                 | 183 |

## **Chapter 1 Background and Context**

In the era of facilitating access to and participation in high quality early education and early care, exclusionary discipline, including expulsion and suspension practices, appears to be a major threat. Although policy makers, the research community, and professional organizations recognize the detrimental effects of early child exclusionary discipline and confirm the need to address this urgent issue, the use of expulsion and suspension practices remain prevalently used in early childhood programs, especially childcare programs that are outside of state prekindergarten systems (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, 2014) With a commitment to high quality, inclusive early education and care, the present study aspires to understand the gap between public policy and childcare practice by investigating the decision-making process involved in the use of exclusionary discipline practices by analyzing the voices of key informants including administrators and teachers.

This chapter begins with introducing the importance of high quality early education and care. This is followed by discussing the current status of childcare quality. Then the topic of this study, the issue of early childhood expulsion and suspension, is introduced. The actions and subsequent recommendations taken by the federal government, research community, and professional organizations to reduce and eventually eliminate expulsion and suspension practices are summarized. As a part of the summary, gaps between “what is known” and “what is yet to be known” are highlighted. The chapter concludes with statement of the problem, research purposes, and research questions.

### **The Commitment to High Quality Early Care and Education**

High-quality early care and education is critical for building the early foundation of children’s learning, development, and wellness. A robust body of both social- and neuro-science



research has demonstrated the benefits of quality early care and education for children, families, communities, and society (Belsky et al., 2007; Gormley et al., 2005; Mashburn et al., 2008; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Schweinhart and colleagues (2005), for example, conducted a longitudinal, randomized-controlled-trial study of 123 low-income African-American children who received preschool education for 2.5 hours per day, 5 days per week, over a 30-week school year. By the end of the study, those participating in the preschool education gained higher intelligence quotient scores than the control group. Following their progress through k-12 education, these children were also reported to have higher reading and math achievement, better classroom and personal behavior, less youth misconduct and crime, fewer years of special education, and a higher high school graduation rate. A 40-year-follow-up also showed that children who were enrolled in the preschool program had increased earnings, decreased dependency on social welfare programs, reduced arrests and improved health behaviors. A number of other studies have documented similar outcomes (e.g., Gormley et al., 2005; Peisner-Feinbert et al., 2001; Schulman, 2005). That is, access to and participation in high quality child care produces short- and long-term positive effects on children's development across all domains including cognitive, language and literacy, motor development, and social emotional development.

Such effects of quality early care and education are increasingly used to prioritize and support social programs and policies. The Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act of 2014 increased its focus on the delivery of high quality services as directly illustrated in its goal to “enhancing the quality of child care and the early childhood workforce.” The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2013) issued a call for excellence in early childhood education with a vision that all young children deserve access to excellent early

care and education and that high quality early experiences make a difference in children's lifelong academic and social successes. In fact, among 12 million preschoolers in the United States, 64.2% were enrolled in some form of early care and/or education programs including center-based care and home-based care in 2012 compared with 52.5% in 1980 (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

However, this rate of growth is far from sufficient. Across the nation, only 45% of children from 3 to 5 years old are provided early care and education by publicly funded preschool programs through state preschool, Head Start, and state special education preschool (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Only half of these children are enrolled in full-day programs. Even more troubling, preschoolers, especially those enrolled in non-federally- or -state-funded programs represented by a majority of childcare programs, still face the challenge of not having access to high-quality education and care (National Institute for Early Education Research, 2013; Nores & Barnett, 2014).

### **The Current Status of Child Care Quality**

The value of child care as early childhood education in addition to its value as a support system for working families has been well recognized by policymakers, community leaders, and childcare advocates. Research has shown that quality child care programs, similar to publicly funded early education programs (e.g., Head Start) contribute to the overall short- and long-term outcomes of children and families (Child Care Aware, 2017; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001). Assistance such as the federal CCDBG has increased its focus on and support to increasing the quality of child care in the nation. Strategically, states that are receiving CCDBG support are investing in raising the quality of childcare programs as well as improving affordability of and

access to child care. However, many challenges remain in the aspects of quality and access of childcare programs.

The quality of many childcare programs has not met the growing needs of children, families, and the society. For example, studies have shown that research-based instruction and child development practices are not being sufficiently applied to teaching methods in childcare settings (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015). In addition, childcare programs tend to hire relatively untrained and inexperienced staff who are often not provided with effective continuing education or coordinated professional development (Child Care Aware, 2017). The retention of the childcare workforce has also been a practical challenge in part due to low compensation. Gable and Cole (2000) found that one-third of childcare workers leave their jobs on an annual basis. A Child Care Aware of America (Child Care Aware, 2017) report noted that in 2016, the average annual salary for the approximately 2.2 million childcare classroom staff in the United States was \$22,310, with providers in some states making as little as \$18,800 on average. Low wages combined with a high staff turn-over rate has created an ever-changing and inconsistent environment for many children and families.

Beside quality, access to child care has been a real challenge to many families, especially those with low-income background and those that have a child with a disability (Dobbins, Tercha, McCready, & Liu, 2016). First of all, even though CCDBG has been consistently investing in providing financial assistance to low-income families, patterns of investments have not kept up with demographic shifts. Only 15% of the 14.2 million children eligible for CCDBG subsidies receive the subsidy, leaving the rest of the children and families at risk for not having access to affordable childcare. Second, spaces for children with disabilities are limited in many childcare programs and families struggle to find placement that can help their children succeed

or reach their developmental potential. Focus groups held by Child Care Aware of America in 2016 found that families of children with disabilities expressed particular difficulties accessing any affordable child care (Child Care Aware, 2017). Parents reported having been told either that providers could not admit their children with special needs or having to move their children to different providers multiple times due to behavioral issues and expulsion from the program.

In summary, even though efforts such as CCDBG have increased the focus on and supports for increasing access, affordability, and the quality of child care in the United States, families especially those with low-income and those whose children have disabilities continue to encounter frequent barriers and challenges in finding accessible, affordable, and high-quality child care.

### **The Compounding Effects of Expulsion and Suspension**

In addition to the above barriers and challenges, a major threat to children's access to early care and education opportunities is that many young children are expelled and suspended from early childhood programs (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Recent data indicate that these exclusionary discipline practices (i.e., expulsion and suspension) occur at high rates in preschool settings. In 2011, the Office of Civil Rights collected preschool discipline data and revealed that over 8,000 preschoolers were suspended at least once, of more than 1 million preschoolers enrolled (U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Among these preschoolers, some were reported as suspended multiple times. Although Civil Rights Data Collection (2011-2012) only collected data on out-of-school suspensions and did not include data on private preschools or childcare programs, previous research found that preschoolers across early childhood settings are more likely to be expelled and suspended than K-12 students (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar,

2006; Perry, Holland, Darling-Kuria, & Nativ, 2011). Moreover, the expulsion and suspension rate is far higher for young children in childcare settings outside of state prekindergarten systems (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Several factors have been found to be consistent predictors of expulsion and suspension including gender, race, and poverty. Boys, black children, and children with low socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to expulsion and suspension (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, & Shic, 2016; Nichols, 2004; Petras et al., 2011; Wu et al., 1982).

Exclusionary discipline (i.e., expulsion and suspension) is one of the most severe consequences that a school/program can impose for unacceptable child behaviors (Council on School Health, 2013; Morrison et al., 2001). The intention is for these practices to serve as a form of punishment to reduce the likelihood of future occurrences of unacceptable behaviors (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). However, research has clearly shown that expulsion and suspension have failed to serve the function of punishment as a means to correct student behaviors and improve student outcomes.

Early expulsion has been the strongest predictor of expulsion in later school grades (Lamont et al., 2013; Petras et al., 2011; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Young children who experience early expulsion are 10 times more likely to drop out of high school than their peers. Additionally, school suspension has been found to be a moderate to strong predictor of retention, late graduation, and placement in the juvenile justice system (Mendez, 2003; Skiba et al., 2006). When young children are temporarily (i.e., suspension) or permanently (i.e., expulsion) removed from early care and education, they are also deprived access to educational opportunities and they have limited access to educational, counseling, or mental health services or interventions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). To

summarize, even though the use of expulsion and suspension practices is prevalent in early childhood settings, such exclusionary discipline practices have only resulted in detrimental effects on the short-term and long-term outcomes of young children and their families.

### **An Urgency to Address Early Childhood Expulsion and Suspension**

To address this concern, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education (2014) issued a joint policy statement for preventing and severely limiting expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings. The statement emphasizes the harmfulness of expulsion and suspension including: hindering children's social-emotional and behavioral development, removing children from early learning environments and the corresponding cognitively enriching experiences, delaying or interfering with the process of identifying and addressing underlying issues, such as disabilities or mental health issues, and contributing to increased family stress and burden.

The statement also provides multi-level and multi-dimensional recommendations for early childhood programs and state actions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These recommendations highlight the needs for preventative guidance and discipline practices, expulsion and suspension policies, technical assistance in workforce development, progress assessment, and free resources to enhance staff training and strengthen family partnerships. Each of these recommendations provides a potential path to remedy early childhood expulsion and suspension. For example, the policy statement in its recommendations addresses professional development for teachers and support staff to ensure their access to behavioral specialists and support. Teachers play a significant role in supporting children's growth in social emotional competency and deciding which child because of what behavior, in what circumstances should be considered for expulsion or suspension (Gilliam,

2006; Reynolds et al., 2001). Therefore, states and programs are urged to invest in workforce preparation and development, develop coordinated data systems to better track information on early childhood workforce professional development, and increase teachers' access to behavioral or mental health specialists (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). These recommendations note that efforts to train and support the early childhood workforce is critical for preventing, reducing, and ultimately eliminating expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The need to prevent, limit, and ultimately eliminate expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings is urgent. Young children, especially those from low-income families and with challenging behaviors, are particularly vulnerable to exclusionary discipline practices (Qi & Kaiser, 2003; Skiba et al., 2014; Webster-Stratton & Hammond, 1998). Since 2005 when an initial study addressing early childhood expulsion and suspension, Gilliam (2005), was published, there have been a number of studies and federal initiatives striving to understand and address early childhood exclusionary discipline as a means to increase young children's access to quality early education and care. These efforts, along with research on K-12 disciplinary practices, have shown that: a) expulsion and suspension are real issues in early childhood programs and such practices have detrimental effects on children and families (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010; Skiba et al., 2014); b) certain groups of children are more vulnerable to expulsion and suspension such as children placed in childcare settings outside of state prekindergarten systems, boys, black children, children with challenging behaviors, and children with low socioeconomic status (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Gilliam et al., 2016; Nichols, 2004; Petras et al., 2011; Wu et al., 1982); c) the high rate of school expulsion and suspension is

determined by factors at multiple levels, thus the solutions to address discipline practices should take these levels of factors into considerations (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006); d) the existence of high-rate expulsion and suspension in early childhood settings is in part due to the fact that programs and teachers are not prepared or supported to prevent or appropriately address children's challenging behaviors (Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor & Miels, 2012; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Hemmeter et al., 2007; Smith, 2006); and e) studies and initiatives focusing on supporting and coaching early childhood workforce have shown initial evidence of effectiveness in addressing expulsion and suspension practices (Hemmeter et al., 2007; Perry, Dunne, McFadden, & Campbell, 2008).

However, the investigation of the issue of early childhood expulsion and suspension is still preliminary and many questions remain unanswered. First, expulsion and suspension practices have at times been treated as isolated events that take place at the spur of the moments with little forethought or planning. Others have, however, suggested that the use of expulsion and suspension is an extended series of decisions made across time with a number of cumulative events. For example, Cutts and Moseley (1941) argued that removal operates on a complicated continuum with the misbehaving child seemingly in constant transition, starting from within class removals (e.g., "time-out") to out of class removals (e.g., sending the child to the principal's office), and to more severe consequences (e.g., out-of-school suspension and expulsion). As noted by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), the decision-making process involving most human service type decisions is significantly impacted by the context, the individuals involved and the sense of urgency experienced. These factors need to be, but have not been sufficiently, taken into account to understand and address early childhood exclusionary discipline practices.



In addition, limitations related to the methodology used to understand and address early childhood expulsion and suspension also needs to be addressed. The majority of existing studies in this area used quantitative and experimental methods such as survey and quasi-experiment design (e.g., pre-post). In understanding “what is going on,” a number of studies applied survey methods and followed-up with descriptive and/or statistical analyses (e.g., Gilliam. 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). These studies were able to reveal the high-rate of expulsion and provide descriptions for whom and in which types of early childhood settings this high-rate suspension occurred. Another set of studies are devoted to understanding “how can we change it” (e.g., Hemmeter et al., 2007; Perry et al., 2008). By manipulating independent variables (e.g., providing professional development and access to mental health consultation) and analyzing pre- and post-intervention data, these studies suggest potential ways to reduce and ultimately eliminate the use of expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings. While the methodologies used by the existing research have answered some critical questions related to early childhood expulsion and suspension, they are not all suitable or sufficient to understand expulsion and suspension as a decision-making process. Parker, Paget, Ford, and Gwernan-Jones (2016) indicated that qualitative methodology, a particularly useful approach for investigating process, perspectives, and human experiences, have seldom been used in understanding expulsion and suspension practices, especially those occurring in early childhood settings.

Finally, an important question is: what approaches do we use to solve the problem of early expulsion and suspension? A few studies seem to have taken a positivism paradigm with an assumption that expulsion and suspension can be solved by directly addressing children’s challenging behaviors through professional development for the early childhood workforce (e.g., Hemmeter et al., 2007; Perry et al., 2008). Although this study to a great extent agrees with this

paradigm and values the findings and discoveries, it also recognizes the complexity and contextualization of early childhood exclusionary discipline practices and aims to diversify paradigms and methodologies to contribute to the continual improvement of our understanding of this critical issue.

As a continuation and addition to previous studies on early childhood expulsion and suspension, this study's aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of the formation and decision-making process of preschool exclusionary discipline practices (i.e., exclusion and suspension) by applying a mixed-method design. In addition, this dissertation is a part of a federally funded grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that not only is designed to better understand the issue but also to provide professional development (i.e., staff training and on-going coaching) to increase teachers' competence and confidence in addressing challenging behaviors and promoting young children's social emotional development. Therefore, a secondary purpose of the dissertation is to identify the early educator's needs to achieve this outcome.

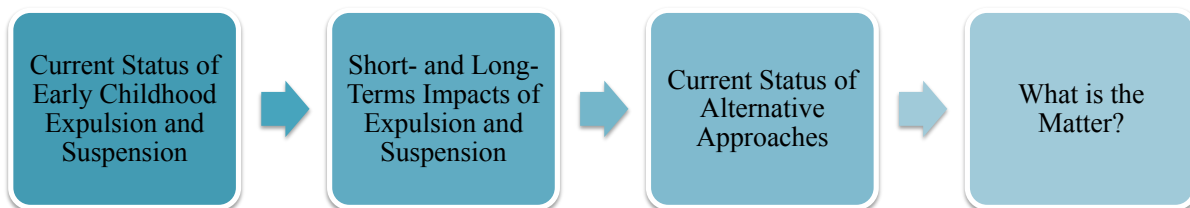
The study is designed to answer the following research questions: 1. How do childcare providers (i.e. administrators and teachers) describe their understanding of and feelings about the challenging behaviors of young children? 2. How do childcare providers promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors? 3. In what situations are expulsion and suspension reported as used or considered for use? 4. How do childcare providers describe their feelings about the use of expulsion and suspension? 5. What challenges do childcare providers report encountering in promoting social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors? 6. What professional development supports do childcare providers report needing in order to better promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors?

In the following chapters, I review relevant literature (Chapter 2), discuss my methodology decisions (Chapter 3), present study results (Chapter 4), and conclude with discussions of the results in relation to implications for research (Chapter 5).

## Chapter 2 Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to understand the formation and decision-making process of preschool exclusionary discipline practices, particularly expulsion and suspension. Several areas of literature were critical to the framing of this study. When reviewing the relevant literature, I address both the methodology and the findings. The review begins with a reporting of the current status of early childhood exclusionary discipline practices. That is, what is known about the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices and how this information has been documented. The next section of the literature review explores the impacts of the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices on the short-term and long-term outcomes for children, their families, schools, and society in general. The third section highlights initiatives and efforts including evidence-based practices that have been and are being applied to address children's challenging behaviors as a means to reduce the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices. In the final section, I attempt to ask: why expulsion and suspension practices continue to occur at such a high rate in early childhood settings even though they are known to be detrimental and given that there are well-established practices for addressing challenging behaviors? Throughout the review, I reflect on the existing literature to frame my research questions and the design of this study (see Figure 1 for literature review steps).

Figure 1: Steps of Literature Review



## **Current Status of Early Childhood Expulsion and Suspension**

School discipline including expulsion and suspension practices have been discussed and investigated for many years. However, only recently has public attention turned to early childhood expulsion and suspension (Gilliam, 2005). In this section, I attend to the following questions when analyzing the handful of studies on preschool expulsion and suspension: a) What do we know about the use of preschool expulsion and suspension? b) What methodology decisions have been made to study and understand the use of preschool expulsion and suspension? and c) Why concerns have been raised regarding the use of expulsion and suspension?

Gilliam (2005) analyzed the rate at which preschoolers were expelled from state-funded prekindergarten systems across the nation. The data were obtained from the National Prekindergarten Study that collected classroom-level data from 52 state-funded prekindergarten systems operating in the United States during the 2003 and 2004 academic years. Classrooms were randomly sampled at the state level. The study respondents were the lead classroom teachers responsible for the day-to-day operation of the sampled classrooms. A total of 3,898 teachers/classrooms participated in this study (response rate was 81%). Data were collected over the telephone and teachers were asked to report the number of children in their classroom that were expelled due to behavioral concerns during the past twelve months. In addition, for each child expelled, teachers were asked to report their age, gender, race, and ethnicity. The results revealed that for every 1,000 preschoolers enrolled, 6.67 were expelled. Of the participating prekindergarten teachers, 10.4% reported expelling at least one preschooler in the past twelve months. Among the teachers who reported expulsion, 19.9% expelled more than one preschooler during the past twelve months.

In addition to national rate, data was also reported by state. Significant cross-state variability in expulsion rates was found, partly due to differences in the structure of the prekindergarten systems (Gilliam, 2005). Classrooms in public schools and Head Start programs had lower expulsion rates than faith-affiliated centers and for-profit child care. Having access to classroom-based mental health consultation significantly decreased the likelihood of expulsion. Furthermore, expulsion rates were higher for older preschoolers. Boys were over 4 times more likely to be expelled than were girls. Racial disparity existed with African American preschoolers being expelled at a much higher rate as compared with their peers with other ethnic backgrounds.

In order to compare preschool and K-12 expulsion rates, Gilliam (2005) obtained K-12 expulsion data from the 2000 Elementary and Secondary School Survey (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001). The analysis indicated that the prekindergarten expulsion rate was 3.2 times the rate for K-12 students.

Similar results were found by Gilliam and Shahar (2006) where rates and predictors of preschool expulsion and suspension were examined in a randomly selected sample of Massachusetts school teachers. A total of 119 preschool teachers serving children aged three to four years completed a survey with four questions regarding preschool expulsion and suspension practices, yielding an overall response rate of 64.32%. Different from Gilliam (2005), this study had a more diverse school sample including a mix of public and private schools, Head Start programs, and for-profit and nonprofit childcare programs. Of the participating teachers, 39.3% reported having expelled at least one child from their program over the past twelve months. Of the teachers who reported having expelled at least one child, 75% reported expelling one child, 15.9% reported expelling two children, 6.8% reported expelling three children, and 2.2%

reported expelling six children during the past twelve months. This rate was more than 13 times the national K-12 rate. The suspension rate was slightly lower with 14.7% of the surveyed teachers reporting suspending at least one child from their program. Of these teachers, 52.9% reported suspending one child, 23.5% suspended two children, and 23.5% reported suspending three children in the past twelve months. Further correlational analysis yielded that teachers who reported expelling at least one child were significantly more likely to have also suspended at least one child ( $r = .32$ ,  $P < .01$ ), and vice-versa.

In addition, to examine factors and predictors related to the use of preschool expulsion and suspension practices, Gilliam and Shahar (2006) included program variables (i.e., program type, group size, child- staff ratios, teachers' highest degree, whether the teacher held a bachelor's degree in early education, and the number of hours the classroom operated per day), characteristics of the children in the class (proportion of children younger than three years, three years old, four years old, and five years old or older; and proportion of children in the class who were African American, Latino, White, or with other ethnicity), and teacher-rated variables (teachers' sense of job control, job demands, job resources, pedagogical belief and practices, and depressive symptoms). Bivariate analyses followed by hierarchical logistic regression analyses indicated that a few factors significantly predicted the use of expulsion and suspension practices. First of all, teachers in public schools or Head Start programs were 3 times less likely to expel preschoolers than those in nonprofit community preschool programs and 4 times less likely to use expulsion practices compared with teachers in childcare programs. Additionally, five other variables were reported as related to the use of expulsion: group size, proportion of 3-year-olds in group, and teacher's job demands, job resources, and depressive symptoms. As a group, classroom variables including the program type, group size, and proportion of 3-year-olds in

group were significantly related to expulsion ( $\chi^2 = 20.00$ ,  $P < .001$ ), with location in a school or Head Start ( $B = -.77$ ,  $P < .05$ ) and proportion of 3-year-olds ( $B = .55$ ,  $P < .05$ ) significantly contributing to the overall prediction. The three measures of teachers' stress and depressive symptoms significantly added to the model, with job demands ( $B = .70$ ,  $P < .05$ ) and job resources ( $B = -.56$ ,  $P < .05$ ) significantly contributing to the model. The reported use of suspension was only related to 2 variables: the proportion of Latino children and job resources. The proportion of Latino children in the class significantly predicted whether the teacher reported suspending at least one child in the past twelve months ( $\chi^2 = 6.14$ ,  $P < .05$ ). The addition of job resources significantly added to the model ( $\chi^2 = 4.13$ ,  $P < .05$ ).

The 2011-2012 Civil Right Data Collection collected nation-wide preschool discipline data focusing on out-of-school suspension defined as “an instance in which a preschool child is temporarily removed from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center)” (p.15, U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The data revealed that nearly 5,000 preschoolers were suspended once and over 2,500 preschoolers were suspended more than once of over one million preschoolers enrolled in public schools. In addition, racial and gender disparities in K-12 discipline were also mirrored in early childhood education and care. While black children represented only 18% of preschool enrollment, they represented 42% of preschool students suspended once, and 48% of students suspended more than once. Boys represented 54% of the preschool population, but 79% of preschoolers suspended once and 82% of preschoolers suspended multiple times.

Gilliam, Maupin, Reyes, Accavitti, and Shic (2016) further investigated racial and gender disparities by examining the potential role of preschool educators' implicit biases as a viable partial explanation. Early childhood administrators and consultants, current teachers, and student



teachers who worked directly with young children were recruited at an early educators' conference. All 135 participants lived and worked in the United States and were fluent in English. The study participants served in a variety of settings, including faith-affiliated centers (22.7%), school-based prekindergarten (17.4%), non-profit centers (11.4%), Head Start programs (8.3%), for-profit centers (7.6%), and other settings (31.8%). Each participant completed two tasks. In Task 1, participants were instructed to expect challenging behaviors (although none were present) while watching a video of preschoolers, balanced by gender and race, engaging in typical activities, as their eye gazes were tracked. In Task 2, each participant was given a standardized vignette of a preschooler with challenging behaviors. Specifically, they were randomized to receive the vignette with the child's name implying either a Black boy, Black girl, White boy, or White girl, as well as randomized to receive the vignette with or without background information on the child's family environment. Following reading a vignette, the participants rated the severity of the child's behavior, the degree to which they felt that nothing could be done to improve the behaviors, and the likelihood of recommending the child in the vignette being suspended or expelled. If suspension or expulsion was recommended, the participants also reported the number of days that they believed would be appropriate for disciplinary actions.

Gilliam and his colleagues (2016) reported that during Task 1, when expecting challenging behaviors, teachers gazed at Black children longer, particularly Black boys. Findings from Task 2 indicated that implicit biases may differ depending on the teacher's race. Specifically, vignettes in which the family's background information was provided resulted in lowered severity ratings when the teacher's and the child's race were the same, but resulted in increased severity ratings when their race did not match. Furthermore, no differences were found

in terms of the teachers' recommendations regarding suspension or expulsion actions. However, black teachers in general recommended longer periods of exclusionary discipline.

### **Summary and Implications**

The studies reviewed can be summarized across three aspects: a) What is known about the use of preschool expulsion and suspension? b) What methodology decisions have been made to study and understand the use of preschool expulsion and suspension? and c) Why concerns have been raised regarding the use of expulsion and suspension?

First of all, data collected at both the federal and state levels revealed that the use of exclusionary discipline practices (i.e., expulsion and suspension) is prevalent in early education and care settings (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam and Shahar, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Expulsion across all studies was defined as a permanent termination of a child's participation and enrollment in an early childhood and care setting for disciplinary purposes. Generally speaking, suspension refers to both in-school and out-of-school suspension (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001). Out-of-school suspension is an instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular early education and care setting to another setting (e.g., home) for disciplinary purposes. In-school suspension refers to an instance in which a child is temporarily removed to a special place at the same program/school for disciplinary purposes (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013; Skiba et al., 2014; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The studies that investigated early childhood suspension practices exclusively included only out-of-school suspension (e.g., Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam and Shahar, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

In addition to describing the rate of early childhoods expulsion and suspension, these studies (i.e., Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam and Shahar, 2006; Gilliam et al., 2016; U.S. Department of

Education, 2014) also conducted initial investigations toward understanding the predictive factors that might be related to the use of exclusionary discipline. These results revealed that factors at different levels (i.e., program, teacher, and child) and the interactions across them can either positively or negatively contribute to the decisions of early childhood disciplinary actions.

When looking across the four studies, the primary data collection method utilized was survey which were then analyzed using descriptive statistics. Although a survey design is appropriate and valuable as the initial effort to understand a particular phenomenon (i.e., early childhood expulsion and suspension in this particular case) by studying a sample of the relevant population (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2016; Fowler, 2014), it does not give in-depth information about “what is happening” and “why it is happening” (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). However, the findings using this methodology and related analyses allow researchers to frame continuing research questions thus diversify the methodology used in the continuing study of early childhood expulsion and suspension.

While an understanding of both the rate of and reasons for the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension is limited, early childhood exclusionary discipline does appear to be a significant concern. Foremost, preschoolers are much more likely to be expelled than K-12 students (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Perry et al., 2011). Furthermore, expulsion and suspension rates differ significantly based on program-level factors including the type of the setting (e.g., public, private, Head Start), the lengths of the school day, and resources provided for the staff and children, etc. Even more troubling is that certain groups of children are more vulnerable to expulsion and suspension practices than their peers even when they demonstrate the same amount and intensity of behaviors. The disproportionality has particularly put African-American boys at risk for being expelled and/or suspended from early childhood and care

settings (Gilliam et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Disproportional treatment and discipline have been noted as problematic because they can result in more negative outcomes for specific groups of children and families (Annamma, Morrison, & Jackson, 2014; Gregory et al., 2010).

### **Short and Long Terms Impacts of Expulsion and Suspension**

The effectiveness of any school practices should be evaluated by examining the extent to which such the practice has contributed to furthering important educational and social goals (Skiba et al., 2006). Thus, in this section I review the intent of early childhood expulsion and suspension and synthesize the evidence regarding the effects of exclusionary discipline on children and families especially those who are more vulnerable to such practices (e.g., black children, boys, children from low income families, children who are enrolled in childcare programs). Specifically, I address the effectiveness of early childhood expulsion and suspension by comparing the assumptions that support the use of exclusionary discipline and research evidence pertaining how expulsion and suspension have or have not aligned with the underlying assumptions.

To ensure a safe and nutritious environment for all children to thrive, American schools have adopted policies and disciplines to address unacceptable student behaviors. School expulsion and suspension are two forms of the most severe consequences that a school district can impose for unacceptable behavior (Council on School Health, 2013; Morrison, et al., 2001). The existence and persistence of expulsion and suspension is justified by the Zero Tolerance policy.

The Gun-Free Schools Act of 1990 (Pub Law No. 103-882) presented the concept of zero tolerance to address behavior control and discipline in schools. Zero tolerance as the most severe

form of school discipline was first introduced to school districts in California, New York, and Kentucky to justify expulsion for drugs, fighting, and gang-related activities. By 1993, zero tolerance had been widely adopted across the nation and the term itself was broadened to include not only drugs and weapons but also smoking and school disruptions (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). With the mandated zero tolerance policy, a school or district could expel or remove a student from the educational environment for offenses deemed especially severe or dangerous regardless of the circumstances or disciplinary history of the student involved (Council on School Health, 2013; Skiba & Rausch, 2006).

A number of instructional and organizational purposes underlie the use of exclusionary discipline including: (a) to ensure the safety of students and teachers, (b) to create a climate conducive to learning, (c) to teach students skills needed for successful interaction in school and society, and (d) to reduce the rates of future misbehavior (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). These purposes serve as the fundamental assumptions justifying the use of school expulsion and suspension. If expulsion and suspension are to be considered effective, their use should at a minimum achieved some of the intended goals. The following section presents an examination of the empirical evidence as to how preschool expulsion and suspension has or has not met the four purposes of exclusionary discipline.

### **Student and Teacher Safety**

The primary purpose of school expulsion and suspension is to ensure the safety of students and teachers. As noted earlier, violent and dangerous behaviors that could cause potential harm should be the foremost target of expulsion and suspension (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). State legislatures and local school districts, however, have broadened the mandate of expulsion beyond the federal mandates addressing weapons, to include drugs and alcohol use,

fighting, making threats, swearing, and even to engaging in nonviolent disruptive behaviors (e.g., spitting, tardiness, verbal disrespect to teachers; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013; Butler, Lewis, Moore III, & Scott, 2012; Cameron, 2006; Chin, Dowdy, Jimerson, & Rime, 2011; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). In other words, the use of expulsion and suspension have not been restricted to the serious safety-threatening behaviors as originally intended, but are rather distributed across a wide range of infractions.

Skiba, Eaton, and Sotou (2004) examined and coded state definitions of expulsion and suspension using state statutes in all 50 states. As a part of the analyses, the types of infractions mandated and/or allowed for expulsion and suspension were reported. The results showed that a majority of states simply presented the names of the infractions without defining the terms for expulsion (n=29) and out-of-school suspension (n=31), which presumably leaves the decision of what kinds of infractions would lead to expulsion and suspension to individual schools and programs. In addition, many states allow and even mandate the use of expulsion and suspension for minor and non-threatening behaviors such as insubordination, inappropriate language, and truancy. For example, inappropriate language including verbal assault and profane language could lead to expulsion in nine states and suspension in ten states. Insubordination such as disobedience and defiance of authority is defined as leading to expulsion by 12 states and to suspension by 12 states.

Skiba and colleagues (2014) conducted an analysis to gain an understanding of the types of infractions that resulted in expulsion and suspension. They did so by using a database containing records for all incidents of expulsion and suspension in all public schools, including charter schools, in a Midwestern state, for the 2007 to 2008 school year. The final dataset used in the analyses included 730 schools, 43,320 students, and 104,445 incidents of expulsion and

suspension. The findings indicated that 75,942 of the 104,445 incidents involved defiance or disruption, the least serious type of potential infraction yet the most common cause for all three categories of exclusionary discipline (i.e., expulsion, out-of-school suspension, and in-school suspension). Of the students who participated in this type of infraction, 60.3% received in-school suspension, 38.1% received out-of-school suspension, and 1.6% were expelled.

The findings of both the Skiba et al. (2004) and Skiba et al. (2014) studies are consistent with previous studies. That is both elementary and secondary students are suspended most frequently for minor to moderate infractions including disobedience and disrespect (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Cooley, 1995; Mendez & Knoff, 2003), defiance (Gregory & Weinstein, 2008), attendance problems (Morgan-D'Atrio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996; Richart, Brooks, & Soler, 2003), failing to report to detention (Rosen, 1997), and general classroom disruption (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999; Dupper & Bosch, 1996). Similarly, expulsion is not always reserved for the most serious or dangerous behaviors as indicated in Skiba et al. (2014).

Although no study has investigated the type of infractions for which preschoolers are expelled and suspended, the Michigan Child Care Expulsion Prevention Initiative reported that 67% of the expulsion referrals they received in 2006-2007 were for children birth through age three years (Hunter & Hemmeter, 2009). Even though the nature of the behaviors which resulted in the expulsion referrals remains unknown, it is logical to assume that very few infants and toddlers were engaging in behaviors related to drugs, weapons, and gang related activities noted in the Zero Tolerance policy.

To summarize, expulsion and suspension, as part of Zero Tolerance, were to be applied to address dangerous behaviors as a means to ensure the safety of students and teachers. However,

because both practices have been applied to other types of student behaviors, even minor disruptions, the effectiveness needs to be further examined considering the other three organizational purposes of exclusionary discipline (i.e., climate for learning, teaching appropriate skills, and reducing the rate of challenging behaviors).

### **Climate for Teaching and Learning**

The next two purposes of school expulsion and suspension are to create a climate conducive to learning and to teach students skills needed for successful interaction in school and society. With these two purposes, a positive correlation should be expected between exclusionary discipline and students' outcomes, yet the adverse effects of exclusionary discipline can be profound (Council on School Health, 2013; Cristile, Jolivet, & Nelson, 2010; Mendez, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Studies by David and Jordan (1994) and Rausch and Skiba (2005) provided data to assess the correlation.

David and Jordan (1994) drew data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 administered by the National Center for Educational Statistics. The database allows researchers to examine contextual and structural conditions of schools as they affect four student outcomes: academic achievement, locus of control, composite grades, and student engagement. Using multiple regression analyses, David and Jordan (1994) found that the number of suspensions a student received negatively predicted individual student achievement in mathematics, science, and history even when controlling for a number of other variables including socio-economic status. In addition, the number of suspensions also was negatively correlated with student engagement. Therefore, the authors argued that the use of suspension is “both symptoms and causes of school failure” (p.11).



Similarly, using discipline records for all public elementary and secondary schools in one Midwestern state for the 2002-2003 school year, Rausch and Skiba (2005) examined the relationship between school discipline and achievement while accounting for the influence of socio-demographic variables. School discipline in this study was represented by out-of-school suspension and expulsion incident rates calculated by dividing the total number of suspensions or expulsions by the school enrollment, and multiplying by 100. School achievement was measured by the percent of students not receiving special education services who scored at proficient or higher in both the English Language Arts and Math components of the state accountability test. With multivariate analysis, the researchers found that higher rates of out-of-school suspension and expulsion predicted lower percentages of students passing the state accountability assessment, regardless of the demographic, economic, or racial makeup of the school.

These findings are consistent with several other studies including Morrison and D’Incau (1997) (students who were recommended for expulsion had relatively low grades and below average scores in reading, mathematics, and language), Mendez, Knoff, and Ferron (2002) (school suspension rate was strongly and negatively correlated with school-wide achievements in reading, mathematics, and writing at both elementary and secondary school level), and Mendez (2003) (reporting a negative relationship between students’ total number of suspension in 6<sup>th</sup> grade and their achievement in math and reading in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade).

Furthermore, decades of research indicates that early learning and early intervention are essential to preventing ongoing behavior problems and poor long-term academic and social outcomes (Belsky et al., 2007; Mashburn et al., 2008; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 2001; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2004). However, when a child is removed from early education and care settings, the school/program may not be obligated to provide any educational or counseling

services, and the child could be temporarily or even permanently separated from the early learning environments and other opportunities that contribute to later development and academic success. In this sense, expulsion and suspension can further disadvantage children with the greatest needs of support and intervention and thus, can potentially place a child on a life course trajectory of social and academic failure (Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2005).

Therefore, when addressing the second and the third purposes of school discipline, no up-to-date research has shown that expulsion and suspension are positively related with a school climate conducive to learning or opportunities for students to learn skills needed for future success. Indeed, both theoretical analyses and empirical evidence indicate that expulsion and suspension may pose a potential threat to both of the purposes.

### **Reduce Probability of Future Occurrence**

The last and the most direct purpose of expulsion and suspension is to reduce the probability of the future occurrence of misbehavior. If effective, expulsion as a punishment should reduce the future probability of unacceptable behaviors. Yet there is multiple evidence suggesting that expulsion and suspension in the early years is positively associated with exclusionary discipline in later school grades as well as placement in juvenile justice system (Skiba & Rausch, 2006; U.S Department of Education, 2014).

Mendez (2003) conducted a longitudinal study based on data from a cohort of students who entered kindergarten in Pinellas County, Florida, in 1989 and whose on-time graduation date was projected to be 2002. Data were obtained from student surveys, teacher surveys, demographic information sheets, students' standardized test scores, and suspension records spanning from grade 2 to grade 12. The results indicated that children with fewer suspension in grades 4 and 5 and whose teachers in grades 3 through 5 rated their behavior as "more positive"

were assigned fewer suspensions in sixth grade. Moreover, there was a strong relationship between the number of sixth-grade suspensions and the number of seventh- and eighth-grade suspensions. That is, an individual student who was suspended in sixth grade was more likely to experience suspension and expulsion again in later grade. In addition, Mendez (2003) found that students who were assigned suspensions in sixth grade were more likely to have poor academic performance and fail to graduate on time.

In collaboration with the Council of State Governments Justice Center in Texas and the Public Policy Research Institute, Fabelo et al. (2011) conducted a state-wide, longitudinal study examining the relationship between exclusionary school discipline and involvement in the juvenile justice system. Data were obtained from both individual school records and school campus data pertaining to all seventh-grade public school students in Texas in 2000, 2001, and 2002. Their overall findings pointed to a clear relationship between experience with exclusionary discipline and later involvement in juvenile justice system. First, about half of the students who were disciplined 11 or more times were referred to the juvenile justice system, whereas only two percent of students who had no school disciplinary actions were in contact with the juvenile justice system. Second, independent of campus and individual student characteristics, students who were expelled or suspended were three times as likely to be in contact with the juvenile justice system the following year. Based on these findings, Fabelo et al. (2011) suggested that “When a student was suspended or expelled, his or her likelihood of being involved in the juvenile justice system the subsequent year increased significantly” (p. xii).

Findings from the above two studies (i.e. Mendez, 2003; Fabelo et al., 2011) along with others (e.g., Costenbader & Markson, 1998; Losen & Cillespie, 2012; Skiba et al. ,2006; Tobin, Sugai, & Colvin, 1996) suggest that expulsion and suspension have failed their function as

punishment. Namely, the probability of the future occurrence of misbehavior does not decrease, rather increases, with the use of expulsion and suspension practices. Several researchers (e.g., Mendez et al., 2002, Skiba et al., 2014) argued that expulsion and suspension are not effective because such school removal does not directly address issues that cause students to misbehave. Mendez (2003) found that the majority of the schools participating in their study did not have problem-solving procedures in place relative to exclusionary discipline. On one side, these schools did not have discipline protocols that regulate the use of exclusionary discipline. On the other side, supports for students both before removal and after removal are missing. Even though the majority of the evidence was obtained from the K-12 school system, a few studies in the early childhood field have shown similar findings.

Garrity, Longstreth, and Linder (2017) reviewed discipline policies from 272 early childhood programs accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children. A checklist with nine essential features and 28 items were applied to rate program policy's adherence to practices shown by the literature to prevent and address challenging behaviors in the early years. The results demonstrated that programs on average received fewer than half of the possible points on the checklist, indicating that existing discipline policies of early childhood programs rarely described evidence-based practices that either prevent or directly address the cause of misbehaviors.

### **Summary and Implications**

Federal legislation and education as a field have increasingly recommended that schools use evidence-based decision-making and evidence-based educational practices. In this section, I evaluated the effectiveness of school expulsion and suspension by comparing their organizational and instructional purposes and the actual effects on students, schools, and society.

As the review has shown, both theoretical analyses and empirical evidence suggest that the use of expulsion and suspension have not met any of the intents and are actually counteractive to the well-beings of students and society. Apparently, the current framework of school removal fails to prove its efficacy or effectiveness. Because expulsion and suspension have not addressed their intended purposes, the next section of the literature review discusses alternative approaches that have been shown effective in reducing student misbehaviors and promoting the conducive learning environment of programs and schools.

### **Current Status of Evidence-Based Practices**

As noted, a growing body of evidence has shown that exclusionary discipline is widely adopted in early childhood and care settings regardless of its detrimental effects on children, schools, and society (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Perry et al., 2011). Because expulsion and suspension were created to directly address student misbehaviors but failed to do so, I attend to alternative approaches, namely evidence-based practices, in this section to explore what else can be done to address student misbehaviors without their involvement in expulsion and suspension. Specifically, four bodies of literature are reviewed: (a) practices that are designed to prevent misbehaviors; (b) practices that directly support children who exhibit challenging behaviors; (c) practices that support the early childhood workforce in addressing challenging behaviors; and (d) practices that promote family involvement and across-system collaborations.

### **Prevention of Challenging Behaviors**

Many children demonstrate challenging behaviors in their early years. While some early externalizing symptoms such as marked noncompliance and aggressions towards peers dissipate during and following the early years, other challenging behaviors persist and even escalate

(Powell, Dunlap, & Fox, 2006). Because a variety of child and family risk factors have been found to contribute to early challenging behaviors that would lead to more intractable misbehaviors as the child develops (Campbell & Ramey, 1995; Huffman, Mehlinger, & Kerivan, 2000; Qi & Kaiser, 2003; Webster-Stratton & Taylor, 2001), researchers have developed and demonstrated prevention efforts such as establishing and implementing high-quality early childhood environment as a means to address the risk factors and prevent challenging behaviors from happening.

Dunlap et al. (2006) conducted a comprehensive literature review synthesizing the principal evidence pertaining to the presence and impact, prevention, and intervention of challenging behaviors in young children. The data specific to prevention yielded the following findings:

- a. Children and their families who access mental and physical care are less likely to have behavioral and social problems;
- b. Nurturing and positive parenting is associated with children who have healthy relationships and reduced challenging behaviors;
- c. High quality early education environment and caregiver interaction are associated with fewer behavior problems and the development of social competence (p.33).

The Cost, Quality, and Child Outcomes in Child Care Centers Study (Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999) was designed to examine the impact of center-based child care on children's development during their preschool years and then subsequently as they moved into the elementary system. This study recruited a stratified random sample of 401 full-day childcare centers (some for-profit and some nonprofit) and two randomly selected classrooms from each center. After data collection on the program and classroom level, the researchers identified

classrooms that enrolled children who would be entering kindergarten in the fall of 1994 yielding a sample size of 826 children. This study followed these children over a 4-year period, from the end of their last preschool year in child care to the end of second grade. Two dimensions of child care quality were measured: classroom practices and teacher-child relationships. In addition, measured children's developmental outcomes included language ability, letter-word recognition, math skills, and teacher ratings of classroom behavior (e.g., problem behaviors) and peer relations. The results showed that children who attended higher quality childcare center were rated lower in problem behaviors regardless of their demographic background. Additionally, this impact on problem behaviors continued in many cases through the end of second grade. More importantly, children who were at risk, particularly those whose mothers had lower levels of education were more sensitive to the negative effects of poor quality childcare and received more benefits from high quality child care. That is, better child care quality was strongly related to fewer problem behaviors for this group of children from the preschool years through second grade. These findings suggest that high quality child care and nutritious teacher-child relationship are effective for behavioral preventions.

A comprehensive longitudinal study conducted by Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga, and White (2011) examined the effects of an early childhood education program on indicators of well-being up to 25 years later for over 1,400 participants (93% African American). The Child-Parent Center Education Program, a publicly-funded intervention, began with preschool and provided up to 6 years of service for economically disadvantaged families in inner-city Chicago schools. This study primarily assessed the link between program participation and well-being of children by age 28. Compared with children who did not participate in the preschool program, the preschool group had significantly higher levels of educational attainment and higher

economic status. The preschool group also had lower rates of crime and justice involvement for any arrests (47.9% vs. 54.3%;  $p = 0.03$ ), felony arrests (19.3% vs. 24.6%;  $p = 0.02$ ), and incarceration (15.2% vs. 21.1%;  $p = 0.04$ ), indicating lower levels of misbehaviors in later life. Moreover, they also had significantly lower rates of drug and alcohol abuse (16.5% vs. 23.0%;  $p < 0.001$ ). Importantly, evidence of enduring effects was also strongest for children who were enrolled in the program at preschool, especially for males and children of high school dropouts.

Both Peisner-Feinberg et al. (1999) and Reynolds et al. (2011), along with a body of literature (e.g., Duncan et al., 2007; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Shcellinger, 2011; Koroly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2006) supports the enduring, positive effects of high quality early education and care on children's behavioral outcomes. In other words, the magnitude, breath, and duration of the impacts for preschool have been found to be one of the most consistent and strongest prevention strategies for early challenging behaviors as well as misconducts in later life (Braveman & Barclay, 2009; Reynolds & Temple, 2008; Schweinhard et al., 2005).

### **Direct Support for Children's Challenging Behaviors**

Considerable evidence supports practices that directly address children's challenging behaviors as a way to prevent later school failure and misconduct (Dunlap et al., 2006; Ingram, Lewis-Palmer, & Sugai, 2005). A key practice that aligns with this goal is functional assessment-based-interventions (FABIs; Lane, Bocian, MacMillan, & Gresham, 2004). FABIs look beyond the topography of challenging behaviors and focus on using functional behavioral assessments (FBAs) that systematically gather information about challenging behaviors. The purpose of FBA is to produce a procedural understanding of how an operationally defined challenging behavior is governed by events in the environment. The common procedure of FBA includes two critical parts: (a) understanding the antecedent stimuli that are associated with a high likelihood of the



behaviors' occurrence, and (c) identifying the consequences that strengthen or maintain the behavior (Dunlap & Fox, 2011; Fettig & Barton, 2014; Hanley, 2012; Horner, 1994; Iwata, Dorsey, Slifer, Bauman, & Richman, 1994; Wood, Drogan, & Janney, 2014). Using data collected through an FBA, an FABI can be developed. For example, if an FBA determined that Child A's tantrums were maintained by teacher attention, a corresponding FABI would focus on changing the manner with which the teacher allocated her attention. It could be ignoring the tantrums, providing attention for engagement in a desirable alternative, or both (Dunlap & Fox, 2011).

There is considerable evidence supporting the use of FABI with young children across early childhood settings (Fettig & Barton, 2014; Dunlap & Fox, 2011). McLaren and Nelson (2009) used a withdrawal design across three children enrolled in two Head Start classrooms to investigate the effectiveness of FBA-based interventions to decrease inappropriate behaviors. The participating preschoolers were typically developing and were selected by their classroom teachers on the basis of their display of externalizing challenging behaviors and a history of consistent school attendance. The FBA component of McLaren and Nelson (2009) included structured teacher interviews and antecedent-behavior-consequence (ABC) observations. Following the FBA, the investigators met with the teachers to discuss the possible functions of the identified challenging behaviors. They hypothesized that challenging behaviors of two of the children were maintained by social attention and challenging behaviors of the other one child were maintained by sensory input. After developing a hypothesis about the function of challenging behaviors for each child, the investigators created individualized intervention plans directly addressing the behavioral functions. For example, the intervention plan for one child whose behaviors were maintained by social attention consisted of teaching alternative

approaches (e.g., nonharmful touching, gestures, or verbal communication) to request social attention and providing social attention for appropriate request and interactions. A withdrawal single-case design was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention derived from the FBA in reducing children's challenging behaviors. The visual analysis of data obtained from observations revealed that for all three children, challenging behaviors decreased between baseline and intervention conditions and increased when intervention was withdrawn, yielding a functional relationship between the intervention and the reduced level of challenging behaviors.

Blair, Fox, & Lentini (2010) examined the effects of the implementation of FABIs on the engagement and challenging behavior of three young children in a community-based childcare program. All three children were receiving IEP services and were selected as study participants based on their display of persistent challenging behaviors. To assess the behavioral functions, Blair and colleagues (2010) collected ABC data using observations and conducted interviews with classroom teachers and parents using a revised version of the Functional Assessment Interview (O'Neil et al., 1997). Following data collection, the researchers and the teachers developed the hypotheses for each child. The hypotheses showed that each child's challenging behaviors were maintained by multiple functions. For instance, one child engaged in off-task behavior, tantrum, aggression, or noncompliance to (a) gain access to preferred tangibles or activities, (b) obtain teacher attention, or (c) avoid task demands. Based on the behavioral functions, the researchers then identified prevention strategies linked to antecedent variables, strategies to teach alternative behaviors, and response strategies directly addressing challenging behaviors. With the child who was described in the previous example, prevention strategies focused on providing frequent, noncontingent attention; teaching strategy consisted of using cues and prompts to teach him to ask for a turn and wait for his turn; and response strategies included

providing positive reinforcement for demonstrating targeted new skills and briefly withholding attention following challenging behaviors. A concurrent multiple-based design across participants was used to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention. The results demonstrated that for all three children, the implementation of FABIs resulted in higher levels of engagement and a reduction in challenging behaviors.

Bruni et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis of single-case research to examine outcomes of studies on behavioral interventions in school settings. Thirty single-case design studies addressing challenging behaviors published between 2009 and 2014 met the inclusion criteria. Of all the included studies, 14.5% had participants who were preschoolers. The aggregate Tau-U, an indicator of effect size, across the studies was .75 (SE = .05, 95% confidence interval [CI] [.66, .85]), indicating 75% of data across A (baseline) and B (intervention) phases improved after controlling for decreasing trends in baseline. In addition, the effect size of studies utilizing some form of FBA prior to implementing an intervention was higher than studies that did not base their intervention on FBA (Tau-U=.80 versus Tau-U=.68), but this difference was not statistically significant.

The three studies exemplified above along with other studies (Donaldson & Vollmer, 2011; Horner, 1994; LaBelle & Charlop-Christy, 2002; LeBel, Chafouleas, Britner, & Simonsen, 2013; LeGray, Dufrene, Sterling-Turner, Olmi, & Bellone, 2010; Newcomer & Lewis, 2004; Rispoli et al., 2013) demonstrated the effectiveness of interventions that directly support children with challenging behaviors by preventing, teaching alternatives, and functionally addressing challenging behaviors.

### **Supporting Early Childhood Workforce**

A well-documented factor in the high rate of early challenging behaviors is that many

teachers are not prepared to either prevent or intervene in these behaviors (Cohen& Kaufmann, 2000; Dunlap, Lee, Joseph, & Strain, 2015). The 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013) indicates that when asked what was the “main topic of the most recent activity to improve or gain skills in working with children,” only about 20% of teachers serving children under five reported receiving specific trainings on addressing challenging behaviors or facilitating children’s social and emotional growth. In other studies, this lack of knowledge and training was noted by teachers, administrators, and family members as the biggest challenge to effective practice (Fox & Lentini, 2006; Perry, et al., 2008; Quesenberry, Hemmeter, & Ostrosky, 2011). Therefore, workforce support has been consistently recommended as a strategy for improving teachers’ skills as a means of promoting children’s behavior outcomes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

A variety of approaches to effectively provide professional development have been designed and evaluated. Benedict, Horner, and Squires (2007) examined the effects of the implementation of positive behavior support (PBS) consultation on preschool teacher’s use of universal PBS practices and the impact on child problem behavior. The consultation focused on behavioral preventative strategies including: classroom materials (classroom rules poster, classroom matrix, and classroom schedule), transition (use of warnings, signals, and precorrection), and classroom routines (use of acknowledgement for following classroom rules, high ratio of positive statements to negative statements, and use of specific verbal praise). Following the preassessment, four low-performing preschool classrooms were selected to participate in PBS consultation. Benedict and colleagues (2007) used a variety of strategies in their consultation model including: goal setting, action plan development, observation, modeling,

as well as verbal and written feedback. Using a single-subject multiple-base-line design across classrooms, the authors found a functional relationship between PBS consultation and preschool teachers' use of universal PBS practices. However, graphic and visual analysis of the data showed an absence of discernible change in the level, trend, and variability of children's problem behavior across conditions. The study argued that the failure to change children's problem behavior might be due to the absence of individualized supports to the teachers or the children.

Hemmeter and her colleagues (2007) conducted a similar study investigating the effects of a comprehensive PBS model with a large Head Start program serving 768 children in multiple centers. The teacher support included workshops and trainings followed by observations and feedback. The three primary outcomes reported were: (a) program staff reported that they felt less stressed and more confident about their ability to support children with challenging behaviors; (b) program staff reported that fewer children exhibited challenging behaviors; and (c) program records documented a significant drop in requests for mental health consultations to remove children with persistent challenging behaviors from classrooms. Thus, Hemmeter et al. (2007) concluded that the professional development increased teachers' confidence in addressing children's challenging behaviors, decreased children's challenging behaviors, at least from the teachers' perspectives, and appeared to decrease exclusionary discipline practices such as "removing the child from the classroom."

Vinh, Strain, Davidon, & Smith (2016) also investigated the link between workforce support and teacher and child outcomes. Specifically, Vinh et al. (2016) examined the effect of the implementation of the Pyramid Model in the state of Colorado on children with challenging behaviors, strategies used to address challenging behaviors, and rate of removal of children from

programs (both expulsion and suspension). The Pyramid Model contains a set of evidence-based practices designed to support children's social emotional development. Two initiatives were highlighted with this project: (a) funding a center to develop model sites, a state-level planning team, ongoing practitioner training, and certification of coaches and trainers all built around the Pyramid Model; and (b) expanding the number of early childhood mental health consultants and modifying reimbursement and payment formula so that direct preventative work with adult providers was reimbursable. Survey links were sent by email or postcard to programs administrators once in 2006 when the project first starts and once in 2011. The final sample size included respondents from a variety of settings including licensed centers, family childcare homes, and Head Start. Respondents identified significantly fewer children with challenging behaviors in 2011 than in 2006. In terms of strategies used to address challenging behaviors, although more respondents reported being somewhat or very confident in their staff's ability to address challenging behaviors in the children they served in 2011, the most commonly mentioned strategies were often reactive rather prevention strategies, and perhaps were not based on behavioral functions. Nonetheless, there was a large increase from 2006 to 2011 in the percentage of staff using "teaching appropriate behaviors" to address challenging behaviors. Lastly, the rate of permanent removal (i.e., expulsion) decreased substantially with a rate of four per 1,000 children in 2011 compared to the previous 2006 rate of ten per 1,000 children. Similarly, 91% of participants reported that no children were temporarily removed from their program (i.e., out-of-school suspension) due to challenging behaviors.

In conclusion, based on reports of a lack of workforce competence, the federal government including major funding agencies for early childhood education and care emphasizes the importance of continuing support for programs and teachers as a primary strategy to address

children's challenging behaviors (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014). However, existing research has shown mixed evidence of the effectiveness of workforce support. For example, Benedict et al. (2007) did not find a functional relationship between the implementation of mental health consultation and children's behavioral outcomes. Even though Hemmeter et al. (2007) found decreased levels of challenging behaviors, such outcomes were primarily reported by teachers who participated in this study and were not blind to the intervention. Vinh et al. (2016) indicated a more promising relationship between workforce support, children's behavioral outcomes, and reduced rate of exclusionary discipline. However, support for teachers and staff members was only a part of the initiative that also involves state-level technical assistance, policy development, monetary assistance, and overall improvement of program quality. Therefore, it is hard to conclude that workforce support itself would decrease children's challenging behavior and eliminate early childhood expulsion and suspension practices.

### **Supporting Collaborative Partnerships with Families**

Family partnerships in the early childhood context are defined as, "Parents and other family members working together with professionals in pursuit of a common goal where the relationship between the family and the professional is based on shared decision-making and responsibility and mutual trust and respect" (Dunst, Trivette, & Snyder, 2000, p.32). School and family partnerships have always been a cornerstone of early childhood education and care. Head Start, from its inception, adopted a philosophy of parent-educator partnerships with a focus on facilitating parental participation in Head Start, parent-teacher collaboration, and parental decision-making (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Head Start Act, 1998; Henrich & Gadaire, 2007).

The significance of partnerships is also evident in public policy and federal legislation (Epsterin, 2001; Osher & Osher, 2002). For example, collaborative partnerships between parents and schools were identified as one of six principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; Turnbull, Turnbull, Stowe, & Wilcox, 2000). Other federal laws such as Title I and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act also address the importance of partnerships between families and professionals. In addition, professional organizations including the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) of the Council for Exceptional Children and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) emphasize that families are essential to promoting children's developmental outcomes across all domains. Therefore, family-centered practices and efforts to promote family-professional partnerships are strongly recommended.

Compared with its conceptual meanings, collaborative partnerships with families lack empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness in relation to children's outcomes (Sheldon & Epstein, 2002). However, research has shown that when parent-professional partnerships and family-centered practices are adopted with fidelity, families are more satisfied and perceive early childhood programs as more family-centered (DeChillo, Koren, & Schultze, 1994; Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002; Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2001). Moreover, research has documented that a healthy parent-professional partnership can help increase parental beliefs about their own self-efficacy and empowerment (Dunst & Dempsey, 2007; Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2007). Considering the fact that parenting and family environment are highly correlated with children's short-term and long-term outcomes, the research community has widely accepted the idea that parental involvement and professional-family partnerships are critical to the prevention and intervention of challenging behaviors (Dunst & Trivette, 2009; Fettig & Barton, 2014; Lucyshyn, Kayser, Irvin, & Blumberg, 2002; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, &



Shogren, 2015). The research evidence, however, suggests that parent-professional partnerships remain a major challenge to many teachers and programs/schools (Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011; Garriott, Wandry, & Snyder, 2000; Harry, Allen, & McLaughlin, 1995; Ramirez, 2003; Rao, 2000).

In summary, collaborative partnerships between professionals and families are another practice suggested by public policy, federal legislation, and professional community to address challenging behaviors. Even though the empirical literature is limited in supporting the positive effects of collaborative partnerships in regard to children's challenging behaviors, the body of literature on parent-implemented early interventions have shown increased levels of both family and child-level positive outcomes (Blair, Lee, Cho, & Dunlap, 2011; Dunlap & Fox, 2011; Wood et al., 2013).

### **Summary and Implications**

In this section, I reviewed evidence-based practices that either directly or indirectly address children's challenging behaviors as a means to explore alternative options that can replace the use expulsion and suspension practices. Four general approaches recommended within the Policy Statement on Expulsion and Suspension Policies in Early Childhood Settings (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014) were reviewed. These practices include: preventative strategies of challenging behaviors, direct support for children with challenging behaviors, practices that support the early childhood workforce, and collaborative partnerships between families and professionals.

All four approaches have considerable amount of empirical evidence as well as policy and professional support for their use in addressing challenging behaviors. Additionally, the investigation of their effects have begun to address the impact on children's long-term outcomes,

family wellbeing, as well as positive school climate. In fact, a few comprehensive intervention models have adopted key features of all with an intent to use the most evidence-based practices to achieve the most desirable level of positive outcomes. For example, the Pyramid Equity Project (“The Pyramid Equity Project,” 2016) is built upon the Pyramid Model with an additional focus on the discipline disparities in early childhood programs, emphasizing the development of tools, materials, and procedures to address implicit bias, culturally responsive practices, and the use of data systems to understand and solve early childhood expulsion and suspension.

Another model that has shown promise for reducing challenging behaviors and the number of children at risk for expulsion and suspension is the Mental Health Consultation model (Perry et al., 2008). Mental health consultation is defined as an ongoing relationship between a mental health professional and an early childhood provider designed to build the provider’s competence for addressing challenging behaviors and promote children’s social emotional development (Cohen & Kaufmann, 2000). This model has been widely adopted by the early childhood field, particularly childcare programs. The model has two primary focuses: (a) supporting childcare providers to address their specific behaviors of concern for an individual child or family; and (b) providing program-focused consultation to increase the overall quality of the program. While only a small number of studies examining the outcomes of mental health consultation have been published in peer-reviewed journals, Gilliam (2005) found that having access to classroom-based mental health consultation significantly decreased the likelihood of expulsion.

### **Why Does Expulsion and Suspension Continue to Occur at High Rates?**

A variety of evidence-based practices are available for addressing children’s challenging

behaviors in an effective manner, yet exclusionary discipline is widely adopted in early education and care settings even though it has failed to effectively address the problem. In this section, I review relevant literature that discusses school and social factors related to the use of expulsion and suspension practices. Specifically, I target the most at-risk setting for using early childhood exclusionary discipline, commonly childcare programs receiving only minimal public funds (Gilliam, 2005). Three groups of factors are reviewed to understand the reasons behind the high-rate of expulsion and suspension practices in childcare settings: (a) lack of workforce competence and support, (b) implicit bias, and (c) setting related factors.

### **Workforce Competence and Support**

As noted earlier, a well-documented factor in the high rate of expulsion and suspension in early childhood programs is that many teachers are not prepared or supported to address early challenging behaviors (Cohen& Kaufmann, 2000; Dunlap et al., 2015). Findings from surveys, focus groups, and interviews indicate that most teachers do not have, but urgently need the skills to promote social-emotional development and prevent and address challenging behavior (Smith, 2006).

Vinh and colleagues (2016) found through a survey of 741 directors of child care and Head Start programs that the most common method for addressing challenging behaviors by staff was reactive rather than preventive. That is, directors noted that the most common responses to children's challenging behaviors were general talk (25%), timeout (16%), and redirection (16%). Preventative strategies were the least commonly used including praise for appropriate behaviors (3%) and modifying the environment (2%).

Additionally, teachers, administrators and family members identify teachers' lack of knowledge as the biggest challenge to effective practice more than finances, collaboration, and

attitudes (Fox & Lentini, 2006; Perry, et al., 2008; Quesenberry, Hemmeter, & Ostrosky, 2011). Hemmeter and colleagues (2007) found that early educators identified challenging behavior as their top training need and promoting social- emotional development as the second highest. Additionally, studies have also found that problem behavior negatively affects teachers' job satisfaction and administrators often reported that teachers were not effective in implementing prevention/promotion practices (Gebbie et al., 2012; Hastings & Bham, 2003; Hemmeter et al., 2007).

In addition to not having the skills to appropriately respond to challenging behaviors, teachers are also not through professional development activities to develop their skills. As noted earlier, the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013) found that fewer than 20% of teachers and providers serving children under five reported receiving specific training on facilitating children's social and emotional growth in the past year. This lack of skills and professional development support for learning skills has resulted in an urgent need for training early educators (Fox & Smith, 2007; Yoshikawa & Zigler, 2000).

### **Implicit Bias**

Although there is a general consensus of what constitutes challenging behaviors in the research field, student misconduct can have multiple definitions and meanings to teachers and other childcare providers (Lieber, Palmer, Horn & Classen, 2014). These personally-processed definitions carry both individual background and implicit cultural perspectives, making the decision of how behaviors are perceived and how they are addressed a highly subjective matter (Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016). According to social psychologists, this type of automatic and unconscious psychological process that drives people to behave and make

decisions in certain ways is called “implicit bias” (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005; Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Contractor, 2015).

A 2012 report on Preventing Discrimination and Promoting Diversity (Jones et al., 2012) found that biased decision makings, including implicit biases, are pervasive across individuals and institutions, resulting in an inequality in education opportunities. Specifically, although student misbehavior plays an important role in the decision-making process in school discipline, various existing disparities suggest that implicit biases including gender and racial stereotype can influence how teachers perceive and address challenging behaviors, creating a “vicious cycle” over time magnifying inequalities for certain groups of students (Gilliam et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Okonofua et al., 2016; Skiba et al., 2011).

An early study by Arnold, McWilliams, and Arnold (1998) examined the causality between child misbehavior and teacher overreactivity using correlational data. Overreactivity in this study was defined as displays of anger or irritation in response to student behavior. One key finding was that boys’ misbehavior was significantly more likely to result in teacher overreactivity than for girls. Even though this finding could be partially explained by the fact that boys tended to display a greater range of misbehavior than girls, it did provide initial documentation that that teachers perceive and react to behaviors differently depending on student characteristics.

Skiba et al. (2011) reviewed documented patterns of office discipline referrals in 364 elementary and middle schools using data reported by school personnel through daily or weekly uploading of referral records. Descriptive and logistic regression analyses indicated a complex pattern of variations across types of infraction (i.e., minor misbehavior, disruption, noncompliance, moderate infractions, major violations, use/ possession, tardy/truancy, and

other/unknown), race/ethnicity (i.e., White, African America, and Hispanic/Latino), and school level (i.e., K-6 and 6-9). At both school levels, African American students were overrepresented and White students appeared underrepresented in their rate of office discipline referrals as compared to their percentage in the population. Hispanic/Latino students were underrepresented at the K-6 level and roughly proportionately represented at the 6-9 level. More troubling, besides being overrepresented in office discipline referral across all infraction types, African American students had the highest odds ratio as compared to White students for the infraction types of tardy/truancy, disruption, and noncompliance, indicating harsher administrative consequences for African American students even for minor disruptions. Further analyses also revealed that African American students were more likely to receive the most severe forms of school discipline, namely out-of-school suspensions and expulsions, for minor behaviors. They were also less likely to receive in-school suspension for disruption or noncompliance, moderate consequences for noncompliance, and detention for minor misbehavior or moderate infractions.

In addition to differential reactions and administrative consequences, perceptions of challenging behaviors appear to be another dimension of implicit bias. Goff et al. (2014) conducted a series of studies to test three hypotheses: “(a) Black boys were seen as less “childlike” than their White peers, (b) the characteristics associated with childhood would be applied less when thinking specifically about Black boys relative to White boys, and (c) these trends would be exacerbated in contexts where Black males are dehumanized by associating them (implicitly) with apes” (p.526). The first of their studies asked university undergraduates to rate the level of innocence of children within six age subgroups ranging from birth to young adulthood. Studies 2, 3a, and 3b tested the hypothesis that the presence of anti-Black humanization facilitates the perception of Black male children as both older than their age and

less innocent than their peers. Importantly, studies 3a and 3b used actual police use of force toward children as the dependent variable of interests. In study 4, participants were primed with either names of great apes or names of big cats. The purpose was to find whether the category “children” is less essentialized for Black male children and whether this difference is exacerbated when Black children are dehumanized – associated with apes.

The results showed that Black boys were seen as older and less innocent and that they prompted a less essential conception of childhood compared with their White same-age peers (Goff et al., 2014). Moreover, the Black/ape association predicted actual racial disabilities in police violence towards children. In their earlier work, Goff and colleagues (2008) suggested that social protections from violence can be removed or reduced when individuals are dehumanized and when the category “children” is seen to be a less essential category. Thus, Goff et al. (2014) argued that dehumanization of Black boys is a uniquely dangerous attitude that could make this group of children more vulnerable to the criminal justice system.

In summary, implicit bias has been found as a primary risk factor of discipline disparities (Gilliam et al., 2016; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015). However, implicit bias towards historically marginalized groups has not been systematically addressed as part of efforts to reduce or eliminate early childhood exclusionary discipline. Based on the evidence from the existing literature, it can be argued that the unawareness and the ignorance of implicit bias is one reason that we continue to see a high rate of expulsion and suspension practices.

### **Setting Related Factors**

As Gilliam and Shahar (2006) indicated, child characteristics and workforce capacity are not the only factors associated with expulsion and suspension. Indeed, program-level features and infrastructures also have impacts on the decision making of early childhood exclusionary

discipline. Early childhood education and care is a complex field comprised of leaders and practitioners with disparate qualifications and background (MacFarlane & Lewis, 2012). This complexity is furthered by the fact that each state has its own regulations and approaches regarding qualifications, requirements, as well as the universalness of early education and care. According to the national education statistics of 2016, only 45% (ranging from 29% to 85% across states) of children from 3 to 5 years of age are provided early care and education by publicly funded preschool programs through state preschools, Head Start, and state special education preschools, meaning that a large proportion of the early childhood population has not been supported through the public education system. Instead, childcare centers and homes become the primarily educational placement for many young children (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Historically, the educational function of childcare programs is underestimated even though its value as a support system for working families has been well recognized by policymakers, community leaders, and childcare advocates (Buck & Ambrosino, 2004; Child Care Aware, 2017; Macfarlane & Lewis, 2012). Well-documented evidence has shown that staff in such centers are consistently subjected to public criticism about their training background and their practice. Nevertheless, childcare staff is only part of a sector that has been suffering from underresourcing and a lack of support for many years (Macfarlane & Lewis, 2012). The Child Care and Development Grant (CCDBG), the primary, federal support providing financial assistance to low-income families and technical assistance to childcare programs, has only been able to serve 15% of the 14.2 million children eligible for CCDBG subsidies (Child Care Aware, 2017). A consequence of underfunding and underresourcing is that childcare providers are consistently underpaid with many of them receiving only minimum wage (Welsh-Loveman,



2015). This, in turn, limits a program's capacity to hire more experienced and higher quality staff (Child Care Aware, 2017).

The retention of childcare workforce has also been a practical challenge in part due to low wage. Gable and Cole (2000) found that around one-third childcare workers leave their jobs on an annual basis. Low wage combined with high staff turn-over rate have exacerbated the ever-changing and inconsistent childcare environment for many children and their families.

Additionally, childcare programs are also found to enroll the maximum number of children allowed by their licensing requirements causing high child-to-adult ratios (Gable & Cole, 2000; Wolery et al., 2002), which ultimately affects the stress level of the staff and the tolerance level for child misbehaviors. As reported earlier in this literature review, these challenges faced by childcare programs were also found to be factors predicting high rates of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices. For example, Gilliam and Shahar (2006) found that large class size and elevated teacher job stress significantly predicted increased likelihood of expulsion. Moreover, lower levels of teacher job satisfaction were positively associated with the likelihood of using suspension.

The accumulated evidence supports the argument that broader social and contextual challenges are another predicting factor of early childhood expulsion and suspension. Public policies, such as the policy statement on expulsion and suspension (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014) and the CCDBG of 2016, directs states to use a percentage of funds on activities that enhance the overall quality of childcare programs including the capacity regarding behavioral management. However, such calls do not seem to sufficiently address many other historical challenges faced by childcare programs, especially in a political context of massive budget cut on early childhood education and care.

## **Summary and Implications**

Childcare programs are at the highest risk for using expulsion and suspension practices in reaction to child misbehaviors. In this section, I reviewed the literature on the contextual factors leading to the use of exclusionary discipline. These factors include workforce competence and support, implicit bias on child behaviors, and various challenges related to the childcare context. In general, poor workforce support has limited programs' and providers' capacity to prevent and effectively address challenging behaviors. Implicit bias constituted of differential perceptions, reactions, and administrative consequences of challenging behaviors has led to race and gender disparities and negative outcomes for children associated with expulsion and suspension in the early years. Program-level challenges such as low wages, high staff turn-over rates, high staff stress, and large class sizes, have exacerbated the likelihood of using expulsion and suspension.

Although the role these challenges play in the sphere of early childhood exclusionary discipline is well recognized, the existing evidence is somewhat scattered with a dearth of research investigating the depth of the combined effects on the discipline decision making process. Furthermore, even though public policies have started to direct states to address the above issues, the proposed recommendations do not seem to directly address some long-lasting challenges faced by childcare programs including underfunding and underresourcing.

## **Conclusions and Implications for the Present Study**

The issue of early childhood exclusionary discipline (i.e., expulsion and suspension) has received increased public attention in recent years (e.g., Department of Health and Human Services & the Department of Education, 2014). Emerging evidence has documented the prevalent use of expulsion and suspension in early education and care settings (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Perry et al., 2011; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). An even

troubling issue is the documentation of the existence of disparity, resulting in certain groups of children (e.g., boys, black children, children with low socioeconomic status, children served by non-publicly-funded programs) disproportionately represented in the preschool exclusionary discipline (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Gilliam et al., 2016; Nichols, 2004; Petras et al., 2011; Wu et al., 1982).

Exclusionary discipline is one the most severe consequences that a school/program can impose for unacceptable child behaviors (Council on School Health, 2013; Morrison et al., 2001). The intention is to serve as a form of punishment to reduce the likelihood of future occurrences of unacceptable behaviors (Skiba & Rausch, 2006). However, research has clearly shown a failure of exclusionary discipline to achieve this goal. Expulsion and suspension not only lead to the loss of access to and participation in quality early education and care, but also potentially result in negative proximal and distal outcomes for children, their families, and society in general.

In response to the public call of preventing, severely limiting and eventually eliminating expulsion and suspension practices, this study aims to further the line of inquiry on preschool exclusionary discipline by understanding its formation and decision-making process. The design of the study starts with reviewing relevant literature attending to four questions: (a) Why is early childhood expulsion and suspension an urgent issue to address? (b) How effective are early childhood expulsion and suspension as disciplinary actions? (c) What are the alternative approaches to early childhood expulsion and suspension? (d) Why are expulsion and suspension widely adopted in early childhood settings? The literature review centering on the above questions not only helps identify areas warranting further study, but also informs the theoretical and methodological decisions of this study.

First, the research on the issue of early childhood expulsion and suspension is still preliminary with only a handful of studies, the majority of which focus on understanding “what is happening (e.g., Garrity et al., 2017; Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Nichols, 2004).” The lack of investigation reaffirms the study’s general focus on preschool exclusionary discipline and indicates a need for understandings “why this is happening” and “what knowledge is needed to solve the problem.”

Second, there is a general consensus of the detrimental effects of early childhood expulsion and suspension (Council on School Health, 2013; David & Jordan, 1994; Fabelo et al., 2011; Morrison, et al., 2001; Mendez et al., 2002; Rausch & Skiba, 2005; Raver & Knitzer, 2002; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Skiba et al., 2004; Skiba & Rausch, 2006; Skiba et al., 2014). Yet, these practices are still widely adopted by early education and care programs. This clearly calls for additional work to understand both the formation and the decision-making process of expulsion and suspension. Therefore, I ask *Research Question 4*: In what situations are expulsion and suspension used or considered for use?

Third, because expulsion and suspension fail to address the primary purposes of school discipline (e.g., reducing student misconducts, improving school environment), interventions (e.g., workforce support, behavioral prevention and intervention; Dunlap et al., 2006; Dunst et al., 2007; Ingram et al., 2005; Peisner-Feinberg et al., 1999; Reynolds et al., 2011; Vinh et al., 2016) supported by well-documented evidence have been developed and continuously refined to address challenging behaviors and promote children’s social emotional development. However, very few studies have directly addressed these interventions as an alternative to expulsion and suspension. Therefore, there is a need to untangle the relationship between existing school practices and the use of expulsion and suspension. The gap found in this area of research directly

ties to *Research Question 2*: How do early educators promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors?

Fourth, because of the lack of research on early childhood expulsion and suspension, multilevel factors as well as their interactions with the use of exclusionary discipline remain unclear. In fact, even in this literature review, there was a need to look to other disciplines and age groups due to the shortage of investigations on early childhood exclusionary discipline. Although many factors have been found to be either directly or indirectly related, the generalizability of these findings to the field of early education and care needs to be interpreted tentatively. The literature review, however, leads to three potential factors related to the decision making of early childhood expulsion and suspension: practices (*Research Questions 2 and 4*; Cohen & Kaufmann, 2000; Dunlap et al., 2015; Quesenberry et al., 2011; Smith, 2006; Vinh et al., 2016), perceptions (*Research Questions 1 and 3*; Gilliam et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016; Skiba et al., 2011), and support and challenges (*Research Questions 5 and 6*; ChildCareAware, 2017; Gable & Cole, 2000; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Macfarlane & Lewis, 2012; Wolery et al., 2002).

A final area identified as a gap in the literature is the methodological orientation of existing research. As indicated in the literature review, the majority of investigations relevant to school discipline in general applied quantitative research methodology exploring the correlation and causality between various factors and school discipline. Although these studies are fundamentally critical to the research on early childhood expulsion and suspension, to a certain extent the methodological choices have limited their ability to obtain in-depth information about the social constructivism of exclusive discipline (Creswell, 2013; Greene, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Therefore, as a continuation and addition of previous research, this study aims to

diversify the methodology used to understand preschool expulsion and suspension with a prerequisite that such methodological decisions would be directed to answer the key research questions.

In summary, this study takes into account the findings of and the gaps in the existing literature. It is designed to dive deeply into the decision-making process of early childhood exclusionary discipline with a consideration of three critical factors: practices, perceptions, and support and challenges.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The first two chapters describe the significance of this study based on a review of relevant, existing literature. In this chapter, I introduce the methodological decisions for addressing the purpose and answering the research questions. I start by describing how the conceptual framework of this study is formed based on my theoretical beliefs. Then key terms are defined including expulsion and suspension in the early childhood context to more precisely delineate the scope of the study. This is followed by a description of how data are obtained and analyzed by providing an overview of the design of the study, the settings and participants, the data sources and collection procedure, as well as the data analytic plan. The last section addresses strategies used to maintain the trustworthiness of this study.

#### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framing**

The development of this study is based on two theoretical perspectives: the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and the theory of social constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1990). In the following paragraphs, I provide a brief overview for each of the two theories followed by a more applied-level theory that is directly linked to the phenomenon of interest, early childhood expulsion and suspension, for each of the two philosophical theories. Lastly, I use these theories, as well as my own interpretations to conceptualize the decision-making process of early childhood expulsion and suspension.

#### **Bioecological Theory**

The bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) posits that human development occurs through a process called Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT). That is, human development involves the “progressively more complex interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, and symbols in its

immediate external environment” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006, p.797). These interactions (*process*) that lead to the development of knowledge, attitude, and belief are influenced by characteristics of the *person*, multidimensional features of the *context*, and the cumulative influence of *time*. Context is conceptualized as a series of systems that directly or indirectly involve the developing person. These systems include the microsystem, the mesosystem, and the exosystem, each interacting with one another.

The microsystem contains the social structure in which the person operates on a day-to-day basis and has the most direct impact on the development of an individual’s knowledge, belief, and practice. For example, early educators’ work-related microsystems can include the classroom and the school/program. The mesosystem is the interconnectedness between the different microsystems. For instance, the interactions between classroom practices and program requirements. The exosystem represents the broader social, cultural, and political contexts exerting influence on knowledge, beliefs, and practices through regulation, infrastructure, and policy (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

In alignment with the bioecological theory is the conceptualization of school discipline as a multi-level-determined process. Morrison and Skiba (2001) suggest that the path in any school disciplinary incident from student misbehavior to administrative consequences such as expulsion and suspension is a complex and multi-dimensional process. That is, this process of school discipline involves student behavior, teacher reactions, administrative disposition, and school, local, state, and national policies. As discussed earlier, existing research has clearly documented how multi-level factors impact exclusionary discipline practices (Egeren et al., 2011; Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahr, 2006; Longstreth et al., 2013).



In summary, the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and the theory of school discipline as a multilevel process (Morrison & Skiba, 2001) serve as a part of theoretical framework of the study. These two theories hold that the decision-making of expulsion and suspension is a complex and multi-dimensional process. It is influenced by characteristics of people who are involved in the process including child, teacher, and administrator. It is also impacted by multidimensional features of the contexts including classroom, school, and the interactions between these systems. Finally, culture, regulation, and policy in which expulsion and suspension practices are situated also direct the decision-making.

### **Social Constructivism**

Another theory fundamental to the framing of this study is social constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1990). This theory begins with the premise that human beings have evolved to have the capacity to interpret and construct reality. Therefore, realities are defined interpersonally and intersubjectively by ever-evolving human beings. In this sense, realities are socially constructed by individuals within different groups of people and their implications of those constructions differ for their lives and interactions with the physical and social world (Patton, 2015). The work of Guba and Lincoln aligns with other qualitative researchers. “Most contemporary qualitative researchers nourish the belief that knowledge is constructed rather than discovered. The world we know is a particularly human construction” (p. 99; Stake, 1995).

Because subjective interpretation plays an important role in constructing realities, social constructionism asserts that different people construct meaning in different ways, even when experiencing the same event (Crotty, 1998). This premise has at least two implications relevant to the framing of this study. First of all, individuals understand and construct realities based on their own historical and social perspectives. Therefore, each individual’s decision making of

expulsion and suspension may involve different contextual factors and contains different meanings. Second, because realities are socially constructed, a central role that social researchers play is to seek to capture diverse understandings and interpret multiple realities about people's definitions and experiences of the phenomenon of interest (Stake, 1995), in the case of this study, expulsion and suspension.

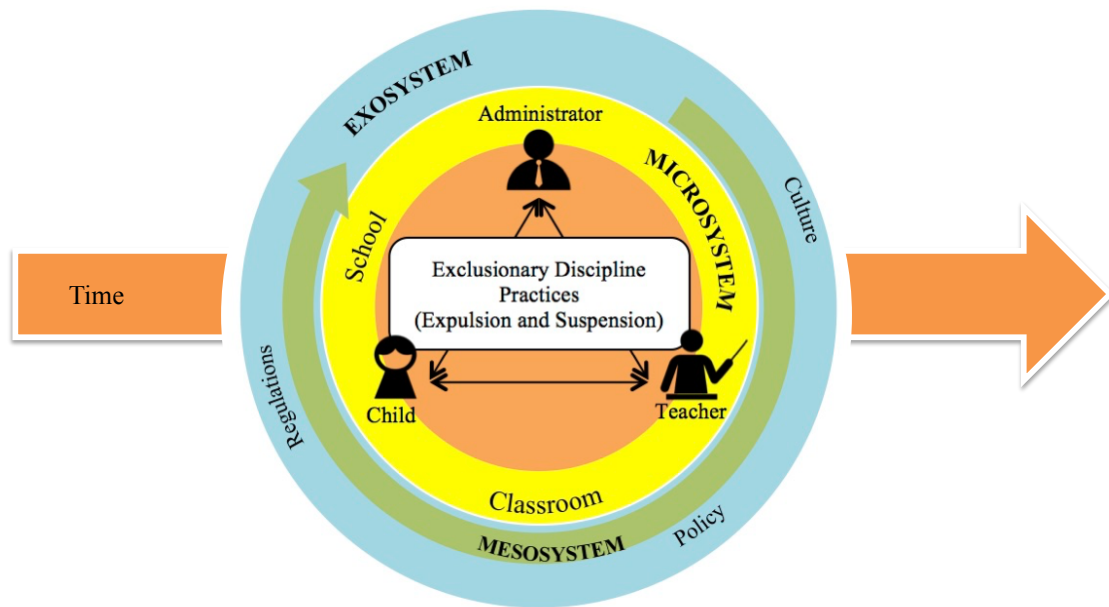
Relevant to social constructionism is Weiner's (1985) interpersonal attribution theory. According to this theory, the way that an individual understands the source and rationale for the behaviors of others impacts how that individual reacts to these behaviors or makes certain decisions about the behaviors. Therefore, if the socially constructed understandings of behaviors are different, the administrative consequences that people individually or collectively choose to address the behaviors may differ as well.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study is drawn from the bioecological theory and social constructivism (Figure 2). From these two theoretical perspectives, I investigate the decision-making process of early childhood exclusionary discipline by considering multi-level factors and analyzing the diverse definitions and experiences of people regarding the phenomenon of interest. Specifically, I look closely at multi-level systems where exclusionary discipline is contextualized. This includes the classroom and school (microsystem), the state and program discipline policies and guidelines (exosystem), and interactions across these systems (mesosystem). Further, I emphasize the social constructivism of the decision-making process of expulsion and suspension by using the direct stakeholders' narratives about their practices and perspectives. Moreover, I seek to capture diverse understandings of expulsion and suspension practices by listening to different voices of different stakeholders. Finally, I explore supports and

challenges that early educators may have that could affect their practices and perspectives, according to both the bioecological theory and social constructivism.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework



### Key Definitions

Definitions of key terms relevant to this study are provided below.

*Exclusionary Discipline* includes "any type of school disciplinary action that removes or excludes a student from his or her usual educational setting. Two of the most common exclusionary discipline practices at schools include suspension and expulsion" (National Clearing house on Supportive School Discipline, 2014).

*Expulsion* refers to school disciplinary actions that permanently terminate a child's enrollment in the regular early education and care setting (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2013; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006).

*Out-Of-School Suspension* is a school disciplinary action that temporarily removes a child from his/her regular school for disciplinary purposes to another settings (e.g., home, behavior center; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

*In-School Suspension* refers to school disciplinary actions that temporarily remove a child from his/her regular classroom to another on-campus site because of challenging behaviors (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

*Challenging behaviors* in this study refer to any external behaviors that teachers have concerns about, find challenging, or need support to address (Abidin & Robinson, 2002; Bradley, Henderson, & Monfore, 2004; Westling, 2009).

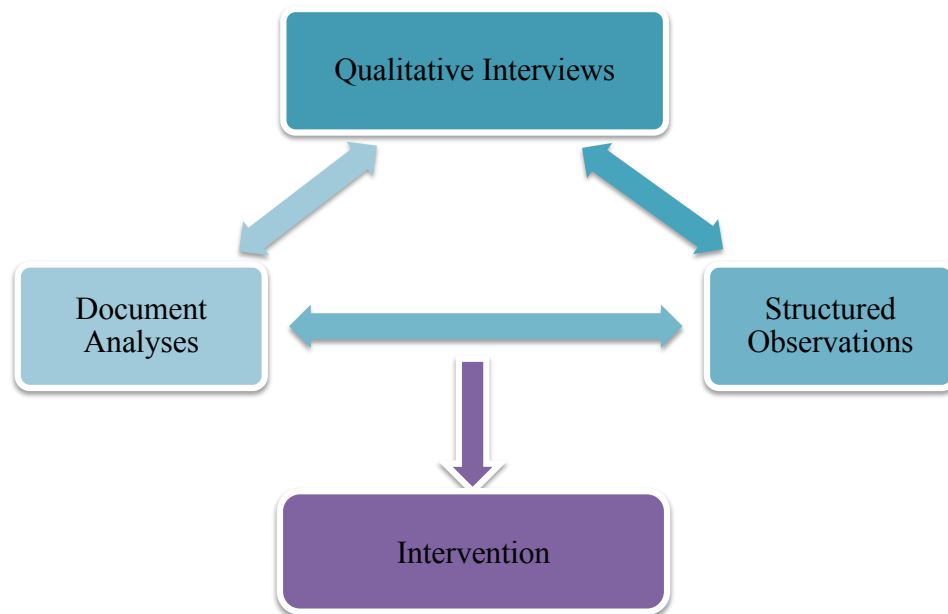
### **Research Design**

In this study, the main strategy of inquiry is a mixed-method design (see Figure 3 for the overall study design). Mixed methods inquiry, by definition, “involves a plurality of philosophical paradigms, theoretical assumptions, methodological traditions, data gathering and analysis techniques, and personalized understandings and value commitments” (Greene, 2007, p.13). A mixed-method design is appropriate because of the complex nature of expulsion and suspension practices and the two-fold purpose of this study. This design allows the use of multiple theoretical assumptions and methodological traditions in the same inquiry space to develop a more in-depth and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon and to use collected data to inform decision-making (Creswell, 2013; Greene, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). Relevant to this study, research methods are mixed for both blending and iteration (Greene, 2007).

The primary purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of preschool expulsion and suspension practices. A blending of different methods enables broader, deeper, and more comprehensive understandings of the phenomenon of interest (Greene, 2007). In addition, the different methods can also be used to triangulate data to assess convergence, corroboration, or correspondence of study results (Greene, 2007; Patton, 2015; Tashakkori &

Teddlie, 2010). In this study, qualitative methods such as interviews with administrators, interviews with teachers, and document analyses were conducted, as well as qualitative methods (i.e., structured classroom observations), to complement and triangulate one another (Figure 1).

Figure 3: Overall Study Design



The second purpose of this study is to identify professional development needs for an intervention study that is not in the schema of this dissertation. In other word, the results of this study will also be used to inform the development of an intervention program for a follow-up study. Therefore, this mixed-method design also serves an iteration purpose (Greene, 2007).

### **Sites and Participants**

**Selection.** This study applied a purposeful sampling procedure (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2015) to ensure that “information-rich” cases are deliberately selected to address the purposes and the research questions of the inquiry.

First, the sampling was criterion-based (Patton, 2015). Existing research has shown that poverty and program structure are both consistent predictors of expulsion and suspension.

Childcare programs that are outside of state prekindergarten systems are much more likely to expel and suspend children. Additionally, children with low socioeconomic status are more vulnerable to expulsion and suspension (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006; Gilliam et al., 2016; Nichols, 2004; Petras et al., 2011). Therefore, the sampling frame (criterion) of this study is childcare programs outside of state prekindergarten systems that serve a large proportion of children from low-income families.

Second, the sampling was theory-based (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2015). Within the conceptual framework of this study, early educators, including administrators and teachers are the key informants involved in decision-making on expulsion and suspension. Therefore, sampling both administrators and teachers helps to understand the multidimensional features of expulsion and suspension and allows development of a detailed and rich description.

Last, the sampling was instrumental. The purpose of instrumental sampling is to “generate generalizable findings that can be used to inform changes in practices” (Patton, 2015, p. 295). It is particularly useful for making qualitative findings part of the evidence for evidence-based decisions and actions. Administrators and teachers are key stakeholders of the decision-making of expulsion and suspension. Understanding their perspectives and practices permits in-depth descriptions of the case, thus allows discussions concerning what to do and how to address prevalent expulsion and suspension practices. In summary, using purposeful sampling, this study recruited three child care programs, their educational directors, and nine teachers from seven preschool classrooms (see Table 1 for all student participants). The recruitment procedure is detailed in the following section.

Table 1

*Participants by Case*

| Case                      | Administrator(s)                                   | Classroom | Teacher(s)                          |
|---------------------------|--|-----------|-------------------------------------|
| Lincoln Child Care Center | Elizabeth (Director)<br>Chloe (Assistant Director) | 1         | Susan                               |
|                           |  | 2         | Caroline                            |
|                           |  | 3         | Victoria                            |
| Bright Future Child Care  | Allison  | 4         | Tisha                               |
|                           |  | 5         | Julia                               |
| All for One Center        | Samantha   | 6         | Ellie (Co-lead)<br>Taylor (Co-lead) |
|                           |  | 7         | Sarah (Lead)<br>Anna (Assistant)    |

**Recruitment.** Following the approval of the human research protocol (see Appendix A for the approval letter), the first stage of recruitment involved identifying childcare programs using publicly available resources, particularly the website of the State Department of Children and Families (DCF). Using two filters, “DCF funded” and “sliding scale”, I identified potential center-based childcare programs that met our inclusionary criteria of serving children from low-income families in the Northeast part of the State.

Once programs (n=9) were identified, I made the initial effort to contact and recruit these programs by using publicly available contact information (see Appendix B for an example of recruitment email). If no response was received within two weeks of the initial contact, a follow-up email and/or phone call was made. Seven of the nine programs responded, four of which expressed interest in learning more and potentially participating in this project.

The faculty advisor and I then met with the director of each of the four programs individually (see Appendix C for initial meeting talking points). All directors were interested in

participating and agreed to assist with teacher recruitment. Printed consent forms and study information were given to the directors. During the next few weeks, I conducted follow-up phone calls or meetings with each of the directors to obtain program consent. Three of the four programs consented to participate. A fourth program was unable to meet the study timeline due to the extended time required for the institutional review by its affiliated higher education institution.

For each program, I intended to recruit one administrator who serves the educational director role. However, the director and the associate director of Lincoln Child Care Center both expressed interest in participating, thus were both recruited. Therefore, a total of four program administrators participated in this study. All were able to complete the research activities regardless of any change of their roles.

Following the programs' consent to participate, the program directors discussed the study with their teachers who had been identified as meeting the inclusionary criteria ( $n=10$ ). These criteria included: (a) serving a lead-teaching role, and (b) leading a classroom with the majority of children being preschoolers (3 to 5 years old). All ten teachers were interested in participating. The directors coordinated meetings with each teacher individually to ask questions and sign consents (see Appendix D for teacher recruitment flier). Unfortunately, two teachers left their program after giving consent to participate but before data collection started. Another teacher who was promoted to a lead-teaching role for one of the two classrooms consented to participate, yielding a total of nine teacher participants. These nine participants represent seven preschool classrooms with two pairs of co-lead teachers.

**Participating sites.** The three participating programs were recruited from the Northeast part of a Midwestern state; program names and locations are changed to assure anonymity. All



three programs are located in one city. This city has two public universities and represents one of the most diverse and multifaceted cities in the state. All three programs are licensed by the state agency responsible for this purpose (see Table 2 for program demographics).

Table 2

Program Demographics

| Program       | Location | Setting    | No. of<br>Children | No. of<br>Regular<br>Staff | Age Group<br>(Years Old) | Child Characteristics |              |               |                  |
|---------------|----------|------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
|               |          |            |                    |                            |                          | TDC                   | IEP/<br>IESP | Low<br>Income | Other<br>At-Risk |
| Lincoln       | Suburban | For-profit | 85                 | 27                         | 0 to 5                   | √                     | √            | √             | √                |
| Bright Future | Suburban | Non-profit | 75                 | 23                         | 0 to 5                   | √                     | √            | √             | √                |
| All for One   | Urban    | Non-profit | 24                 | 5                          | 2 to 5                   | √                     | √            | √             | √                |

Notes: IEP/IESP=Children Receiving IEP or IFSP services under IDEA; No.=Number; TDC=Typically Developing Children.

***Lincoln Child Care Center.*** The Lincoln Child Care Center is a for-profit program established in August of 2004. It currently has 27 regular staff and 85 children enrolled. The center serves a diverse population of children ranging from birth to six years old including typically developing children, children with IEPs and IFSPs, as well as children at-risk for disabilities. The majority of the children are grouped by age with some exceptions.

Interviewer: How do you group the different classrooms?

Elizabeth: By age. Now we have had some situations with some behavioral issues and some physical issues with other kids that we have moved a kid up when they are within that age range, but they may be really young part of that age, and we have moved them up for the benefit of the other kids that they might be having issues with.

Even though each classroom enrolls a certain number of children in compliance with state regulations, there remains some degree of freedom in terms of grouping the children.

Interviewer: Speaking of your classroom, how many children do you have in your classroom right now?

Victoria: I have ten students enrolled in my classroom, and then depending on the day, I could have anywhere from two to four children being moved into my classroom from other classrooms because of state guidelines and numbers. For example, if the class below me, which would be two-year olds, if they go over in the state guideline ratio, then all of a sudden I get an influx of three children that are not typically enrolled in my class.

...

If I only have a student that comes in on Tuesdays and Thursdays, then that means Monday, and Wednesday, and Friday, I'm at nine. If the class below me is over on those days, then they [the administrators] will send up the oldest kid in their class to my class.

The philosophy of the Lincoln Child Care Center program was not provided in either the interviews or the program handbook. However, this program implements the Active Learning Series for Infants through Preschool (Cryer, Harms, & Bourland, 1987a; 1987b; 1988a; 1987b; 1996a; 1996b).

***Bright Future Child Care Center.*** The Bright Future Child Care is a non-profit early education and care center established in 1969 and currently serves 78 children from birth to 60 months with 23 regular staff. The current student population includes typically developing children, children with IEPs and IFSPs, children from low income families, and children with

other risk factors for disabilities. There are seven classrooms in the center grouping children by their age. However, the program uses some flexibility in grouping to accommodate children with different needs and their families.

*Interviewer:* How are children grouped in your center?

*Allison:* It is really by their age ... [But] there are many moving parts in early childhood administration. Dependent on developmental, if we see or if we know from a family member that we have a premature child, or if we have a developmental delay identified, then we certainly can make exceptions for the transitional times. So for example, if we have an infant who is twelve months and not walking, we may delay the move from one to the toddler classroom. [It is] just depending on discussion with the teacher and with the family members. Sometimes, obviously, physicians are involved. So, we make those accommodations.

Described by the director and the teachers and written in the program handbook, the Bright Future Child Care has a strong emphasis on children's social emotional development. The philosophy of the center is to help children "develop positive images" with high emphasis placed on the children, and much personal attention is given to the children in order to make them feel secure, loved, and valued as individuals. The program uses the *Second Step Social Emotional Curriculum* (Committee for Children, 2002), in addition to which, teachers write individual lessons that are focused on building, introducing, practicing those social emotional skills.

***All for One Center.*** The All for One Center is a non-profit child care program affiliated with a non-profit organization providing multiple services and programs for the community including emergency services, food pantry, and child care. The center was established in 1981

with several rounds of name change. Currently, it has 5 regular staff which serves 24 children, over 80% of whom are from low-income families. Helping and supporting low-income families is a shared mission by all the individuals who participated in this study from the All for One Center.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about this center?

Ellie: I like that we help low income families, just like the demographics that we serve, at-risk children, low income families. We are nonprofit as well, so tuition is a little bit lower than any other regular daycare, so that's good that we can – because we have people who also use our services, so the food pantry. So, parents will use the food pantry and other services that we have here, so I think that's good for them and the community that we can serve.

The center currently has three classrooms: a toddler classroom, a 2.5- to 4-year-old classroom, and a 3.5- to 5-year-old classroom. Although children are primarily grouped by age, the program is moving towards a mixed-age grouping approach for preschoolers as it starts to adopt some of the Montessori teaching philosophies.

The program mission is to provide a wholistic approach that is engaging, nurturing, creative, and therapeutic so that every child will be prepared with the necessary skills to participate and thrive in kindergartens. The leadership of the program envisions to achieve this mission by implementing an effective curriculum that stimulates children's learning, maintaining quality teacher by providing ongoing training and appropriate salaries and benefits, preparing classroom environments that enhance leaning and promote peace and order, and providing families access to therapeutic resources and needed services to maintain family stability.

**Participating administrators.** Four administrators participated in this study representing the three child care programs. The participants include Elizabeth and Chloe from the Lincoln Child Care Center, Allison from the Bright Future Child Care, and Samantha from the All for One Center (see Table 3 for participant demographics).

Table 3

*Participant Demographics*

| Name      | Age | Gender | Ethnicity                         | Highest Education Degree | Years of Teaching |
|-----------|-----|--------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| Elizabeth | 55  | F      | White                             | Bachelor                 | 40                |
| Chloe     | 46  | F      | White                             | Associate                | 17                |
| Susan     | 50  | F      | White                             | Associate                | 30                |
| Caroline  | 45  | F      | White                             | High School              | 25                |
| Victoria  | 36  | F      | American Indian or Native Alaskan | Bachelor                 | 8                 |
| Allison   | 43  | F      | White                             | M.A.                     | 2                 |
| Tisha     | 32  | F      | Black                             | Bachelor                 | 6                 |
| Julia     | 47  | F      | White                             | High School              | 24                |
| Samantha  | 56  | F      | White                             | Ph.D.                    | 40                |
| Ellie     | 30  | F      | White                             | Associate                | 14                |
| Taylor    | 26  | F      | White                             | High School              | 7                 |
| Sarah     | 22  | F      | Black                             | High School              | 3                 |
| Anna      | 28  | F      | White                             | Bachelor                 | 2                 |

Notes: F=female; M.A.=Master of Art; Ph.D.=Doctor of Philosophy.

Elizabeth is the director of the Lincoln Child Care Center. She was born and raised in another English-speaking country. She went to college there and obtained a bachelor's degree in early childhood. Back in her home country, Elizabeth owned an NAEYC-accredited childcare center. About two decades ago, she moved with her family to American and started working in one of the local centers. Fourteen years ago, she became the director of the Lincoln Child Care

Center and has been serving this role since then.

Chloe started her journey as a childcare provider when her oldest daughter was about a year old, which was 17 years ago. She then decided to go to college for special education when her son was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. She started working for the Lincoln Child Care Center the same time when Elizabeth was employed, first in the classroom as a lead teacher and then promoted to associate director four years ago. Thus, Elizabeth and Chloe have worked with each other for 14 years since the center was established. They are both very proud of the inclusiveness of the center as well as the resources that they have been able to provide to make children successful.

Interviewer: Can you share more information about this program?

Chloe: I would say I'm the most proud of the fact that we are very inclusive in our center. We take children of all nationalities, demographics, [and] needs. We try our hardest, and we seek outside resources if we need to help, with teaching them and helping them become, I would say hit their milestones, become more age-appropriate, to get along with their peers and stuff. I feel like we are one of the most diverse centers. I don't know for sure, but I would feel like that. We don't really turn anybody away. We try our hardest and seek all resources that we can.

Interviewer: Do you have anything to add, Elizabeth?

Elizabeth: Same thing. I think I'm really proud of where we've got with resources, the ability, and what has provided the for-profit centers.

Allison has served as the education director of the Bright Future Child Care for three years. She taught for two years in preschool while her children were in preschool, and then she

became a positive behavior support staff member in the community for a nonprofit organization for 5 years, during which she worked in about 60 different classrooms in larger county area. Allison served The Bright Future Child Care as a behavioral coach. Three years ago, the previous director retired and invited Allison to take over the leadership. In alignment with their program philosophy, Allison emphasized the role of social-emotional development as the corner stone of teaching and learning.

Interviewer: [Following Allison's previous comment on the importance of social emotional development] Is that [social emotional development ] the core of this [your program philosophy]?

Allison: Yes. Yes! Early childhood here at the Bright Future Child Care, that [social-emotional development] is the main focus to providing multiple opportunities for them to be successful. The academics, the pre-academics that we do here certainly are fostered by that foundational learning of how to regulate and how to manage. We feel that it's imperative that they [children] have those skills before we begin talking about pre-writing, pre-literacy. At the same time, it all meshes together, so while we are working in a center on pre-writing or pre-math, pre-numeracy, we may be sharing writing utensils. We may be sharing resources that are on the table. They may have to take turns. So we try to emphasize to our teaching staff that it's really not one or the other. Everything goes together, but we certainly put a high emphasis on social-emotional well-being here.

Samantha has been the director of the All for One Center for about 9 months. She started working for childcare programs when she was 23 years old, after which she decided to be a child

psychologist and eventually obtained a doctoral degree in child psychology. Over the years, Samantha has been a child advocate and lobbyist for children's rights, especially in protection from abuse and neglect. Nine months ago, she was invited by the board of All for One Center to be the educational director. Samantha accepted the job to because she was motivated to improve the quality of this center.

It [this center] is a nonprofit, it has been there since 1965. It has just been there forever, but it really hasn't had the attention that it needed to run a quality preschool program. It has just been a typical nonprofit serving a lot of low-income families.

Since becoming the educational director, Samantha has had a vision to build a therapeutic environment because "we can safely say that every kid has gone through some sort of trauma in their family." She was looking for a curriculum that would provide a safe and secure environment for the children and decided to adopt some teaching philosophies from the Montessori model.

Number one thing is we have kids coming from chaotic environments, Montessori classroom is everything but chaotic. It's ordered – there is order, there is calmness, there is free flowing movement, there is not somebody barking. It basically is in itself driven by the children. Self-motivated, self-driven, self-learning. The outcomes of what my personal experience of, every kid that I've ever watched or cared for that Montessori background they stood out way above the rest.

**Participating teachers and classroom.** Nine teachers participated in this study with three from Lincoln Child Care Center, two from Bright Future Child Care, and four from All for One Center. Demographic information of all teachers is listed in Table 3 and classroom demographics are listed in Table 4.



Table 4

*Classroom Demographics*

| Classroom | No. of Children |     |      | No. of<br>Regular Staff | Age Group<br>(Years Old) | Child Characteristics |              |               |                  |
|-----------|-----------------|-----|------|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|------------------|
|           | Total           | Boy | Girl |                         |                          | TDC                   | IEP/<br>IESP | Low<br>Income | Other<br>At-Risk |
| 1         | 15              | 10  | 5    | 1                       | 4 to 5                   | ✓                     | ✓            | ✓             | ✓                |
| 2         | 12              | 6   | 6    | 1                       | 3 to 4                   | ✓                     |              | ✓             | ✓                |
| 3         | 10              | 2   | 8    | 1                       | 2.5 to 3                 | ✓                     |              | ✓             |                  |
| 4         | 11              | 6   | 5    | 1                       | 4 to 5                   | ✓                     |              | ✓             | ✓                |
| 5         | 13              | 7   | 6    | 1                       | 3 to 4                   | ✓                     |              | ✓             | ✓                |
| 6         | 5               | 1   | 4    | 2                       | 2.5 to 4                 | ✓                     |              | ✓             | ✓                |
| 7         | 10              | 5   | 5    | 2                       | 4 to 5                   | ✓                     | ✓            | ✓             | ✓                |

Notes: IEP/IESP=Children Receiving IEP or IFSP services under IDEA; No.=Number;  
TDC=Typically Developing Children.

**Classroom #1.** Susan is the morning lead of Classroom #1 at the Lincoln Child Care Center. She has been a teacher for about 30 years serving in multiple settings including being a paraprofessional in a junior high school and leading and assisting childcare classrooms. This is her third year working for the Lincoln Child Care Center. She started off being the chef in the kitchen. She then substituted in the infant classroom, after which she was transformed to the toddler classroom, and then the pre-K (4 to 5 years old) classroom, Classroom #1. She has been the morning lead of Classroom #1 for a year and half and she works from 6:30am to 2:30pm Monday through Friday, most of the time with the children by herself. Classroom #1 has a total of 15 children with 10 boys and 5 girls. All but one children are aged 4 to 5 years old. One three-year-old was moved to her classroom because of his challenging behaviors. Classroom #1 also has a diverse student population with typically development children, children with IEPs, children from low income families, and children with other risk factors for disabilities.

**Classroom #2.** Caroline is the lead of Classroom #2. She was employed by the Lincoln Child Care Center in August 2017. Between August and October, she was transferred across four different classrooms respectively before she became the lead of Classroom #2. Caroline has had over 25 years of childcare experience. Before her job at the Lincoln Child Care Center, she was a singer and a chef, ran her own childcare center, and led a number of preschool classrooms. Caroline works from 7:30 to 2:30 Monday through Friday with the exception of Wednesday when she does not leave until 3:00 to pick up her daughter from school. Classroom #2 has a total of 12 children with the same number of boys and girls. All children are from 3 to 4 years old and none of them have an IEP. A few children are at risk for disabilities because of low income and/or single parent household. For the most of the time, Caroline is the only adult in the classroom.

**Classroom #3.** Victoria was an administrator of a Montessori school for over six years. Since being employed by the Lincoln Child Care Center in September, 2017, she has led the 2.5 to 3 years old classroom, Classroom #3. Victoria works from 8am to 3pm two days every week and from 8am to 6pm on another two days. When she is in the classroom, she is the only adult with 10 children, 8 girls and 2 boys. The majority of the children in Classroom #3 turned 3 years old with two exceptions in the beginning of this study. Most of the children are typically developing with some children from low-income families and one child going through IEP evaluation process.

**Classroom # 4.** Tisha is the lead teacher of Classroom #4, the pre-kindergarten classroom at the Bright Future Child Care. She has been in Classroom #4 since she started half years ago, first serving as an assistant teacher, and then becoming the lead teacher. She has over six years of childcare experiences with the majority of the time spent working for a Head Start program.

Tisha works in her classroom four days every week from 7:30am to 5:30pm. There are 11 children, 6 boys and 5 girls, in Classroom #4, all of whom were four to five years old and getting ready to go to kindergartens. According to Tisha, none of the children have an IEP, but a few of them are from low-income families and three students are in the foster care system. Tisha is by herself in the classroom most of the time. On some days, an assistant teacher helps in the morning.

**Classroom #5.** Julia has been a childcare provider for over 24 years. Half of her career was dedicated for infants and toddlers with the other half spent on providing child care for preschoolers. Julia has worked for the Bright Future Child Care for almost a year. She was previously the assistant teacher in Tisha's classroom. Because the lead teacher of Classroom #5 left the center, Julia was promoted as a lead and she had led Classroom #5 for only two weeks at the time of the interview. However, because Julia works 6:30am to 5pm four days a week, she is also involved in before-school and after-school care where she had already worked with many of the children now in her classroom. Classroom #5 has a total of 13 children, 7 boys and 6 girls. All of the children were from 3 to 4 years old. Some children are typically developing and some others are with risk factors for disabilities including low-income family, single-parent household, and foster care. Usually Julia is with an assistant teacher in the classroom even though it may be a different assistant teacher every day.

**Classroom # 6.** Ellie and Taylor are the co-lead teachers of Classroom #6 at the All for One Center. Ellie has been with this center since she started her career as a childcare provider 14 years ago. Over the years, she has served in the infant, the one's, the two's, and now the 2.5 to 4 years old classroom. Taylor volunteered for a childcare program about 6.5 years ago, ever since which she has been a childcare provider. Taylor was with the All for One Center for two years.

She left for about three years and decided to come back about six months ago. Classroom #6 that Ellie and Taylor co-lead is a small classroom with only five children, one boy and four girls. All the girls were three years old and the boy was turning three. Ellie works from 7am to 5:30pm every day and Taylor works from 8:30am to 5:30pm Monday through Friday, meaning that the children are with either both or one of them throughout their childcare days. All but one children are subsidized by the Department of Children and Family Services. The majority of the children are from single-parent household. None is with an IEP or receiving special education services.

**Classroom # 7.** Sarah and Anna partner to serve in Classroom #7 at the All for One Center. Sarah is the lead teacher and Anna is the assistant. Though their titles are different, they are involved in the classroom activities fairly equally, thus were both recruited for this study. Sarah is a junior in college. Her mom worked for the All for One Center when Sarah was in high school. Sarah started working for the center after she graduated from high school and this is her fourth year serving as a childcare provider. Similar to many other teachers, Sarah was transferred across many classrooms before she settled in Classroom #7. Sarah typically works from 7am to 5:30pm every day. She takes two short days every week to attend college classes. Anna moved to the State in 2016 when she found a job as a paraprofessional helping both general and special education classrooms. Because the job was seasonal, she started at the All for One Center about half years ago and was placed in Classroom #7. Anna works every day from 8:30am to 5:30pm. She is with Classroom #7 majority of the time, but three days in the afternoon from 3pm to 5:30pm, she helps in the 2 years old classroom.

Classroom #7 has a very diverse child population. There are a total of 10 children, 5 boys and 5 girls. The majority of the children are from low-income families. Two children are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder and are receiving special education services at a

public school once a week. One child is being evaluated for IEP services. Another child is referred for IEP evaluation. All but two children are 4 years old. Two younger children were placed in this classroom because of behavioral concerns and the intention that they may behave better with older children.

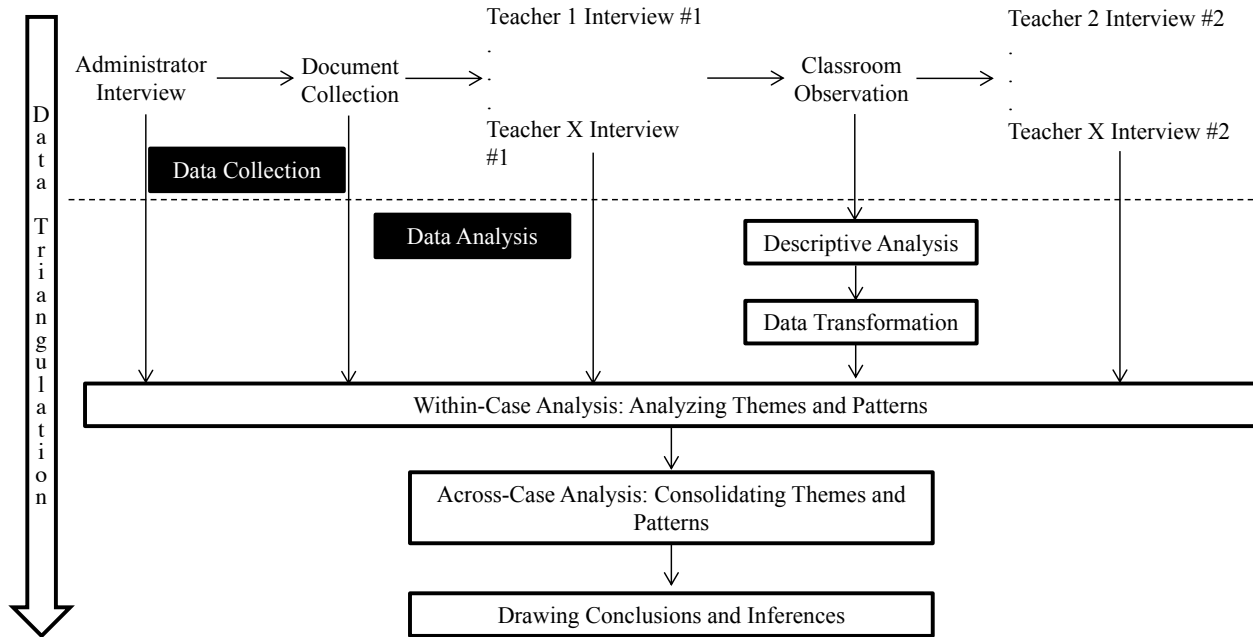
### **Methodology Tools and Data Collection**

In this section, I first discuss my role as the primary research instrument in a qualitative-oriented mixed-methods design study, which is followed by a detailed research reflexivity. Next, I introduce the main data collection activities in sequence of importance rather than sequence of time, meaning that the primary data collection activities (i.e., administrator interview, teacher interview #1) are introduced first followed by supplementary ones (i.e., document analyses, classroom observation, and teacher interview round #2). Following the data collection procedure, I address the data analytic plan (see Figure 4 for data collection and analysis plan).

**The researcher as the primary research instrument.** When using qualitative methods such as interview and document analysis, researchers are the primary research instruments being an integral part of both data collection and analysis. “The quality of information obtained during an interview is largely dependent on the interviewer” (Patton, 2015, p.427).

Therefore, it is important for one to be aware of his/her ontological and epistemological position underpinning the research (Patton, 2015). Of particular importance is reflecting on potential biases and hidden assumptions, as this promotes credibility and trustworthiness of a study (Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005; Patton, 2015). Hence, I reflect on my own stance as a researcher prepared and influenced by a plurality of paradigms within the field of early childhood special education.

Figure 4: Data Collection and Analysis



I was born and raised in China where the population with disabilities still remains silent with their stories unheard and their rights limitedly protected. Ten years ago, I was admitted to the Department of Special Education in a major teacher education college in China where the program had a strong focus on the biological and medical aspects of human disability. Five years ago, I came to the United States and continued my education in a graduate program with a behaviorism orientation. Four years ago, I started my journey as a doctoral student in a department that emphasizes the social, cultural, and political constructs of disability. Looking back, my education as a special education scholar has never been linear or singular and is quite eclectic. It is a Chinese “hot pot” where different perspectives, knowledge, and evidence are all cooked in one pot and I, as the consumer, decide how to mix and match. With the exposure to a variety of perspectives, I situate myself in a plurality of philosophical paradigms and theoretical assumptions, consistently struggling to balance across diverse perspectives.

The biggest struggle that occurred during the course of this study was to balance between

a scholarly view that “suspension and expulsion can influence a number of adverse outcomes,” thus should be “prevented and severely limited...in early childhood settings” (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014) and a contextually situated view that expulsion and suspension are seen and used just as other evidence-based or non-evidence-based practices in childcare settings. In other words, the practices (i.e., expulsion and suspension) that I may see as problematic are not troublesome to many administrators and teachers. Besides, there was also a concern that these key stakeholders might be aware of the scholarly and political views of exclusionary discipline (e.g., Head Start regulations forbids the use of “time-out”, suspension, and expulsion), and might hesitate to share information and opinions based on personal or political concerns.

To address this struggle, several strategies were applied during the different stages of this study. First, the interview protocols were piloted with a childcare program director and his two teachers to obtain feedback on the guiding questions. Even though these three individuals were not participants of this study, they played an important role in helping me to reflect on my own biases and developing less power-differential interview protocols (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). For example, Henry, the program director who helped with the protocol piloting, suggested adding additional questions about “working with families” because families appear to play an important role in the decision-making process of expulsion and suspension based on his experience. He also recommended potential probes and follow-up questions during salient conversations. For instance, with the question “how effective is the use of expulsion?” Henry suggested to follow up with “how do you evaluate the effectiveness of this strategy?” In addition, Henry and the other two teachers provided extensive feedback to the wording of guiding questions to make these less intimidating

and more approachable to the “real world” of child care.

In addition, to fully engage administrators and teachers in conversations about expulsion and suspension, I sought to be both empathic and neutral as well as to attend carefully to their responses (Patton, 2015). Being both neutral and nonjudgmental was particularly important to my own reflexivity because the responses by the interviewees might be in opposition to my own scholarly and political views, yet maintaining the neutrality is the key to understand the complex and subjective meanings of their perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To some extent, it was more important for me to understand why they think in certain ways and believe in certain things rather than what they think or perceive.

Furthermore, during the course of the study, I frequently reflected on my own influence on the data as I represented the views of my participants. I understand that I am the primary research instrument collecting data, co-constructing data with the participants, and analyzing data (Kinloch & San Pedro, 2014; Paris, 2011). I recognize that the quality of my interpretation of the data directly relates to the accuracy of representation and the quality of the study. Therefore, during interviews, I often restated salient information that the participants shared and checked for coherences and/or discrepancies of my interpretations. It was through these conversations where I engaged my participants to co-construct and co-interpret data.

In summary, conducting a more qualitative-oriented mixed-methods study as a researcher who was previously trained with positivism and postpositivism paradigms has not been an easy task, which makes it more important to engage in self-reflection of my own biases and theoretical beliefs. Importantly, because of my own limitations, I relied heavily on my participants to construct data, interpret data, generate representative results, with a goal to gain an more in-depth understanding of the use of expulsion and suspension practices.



**Qualitative interviews.** Qualitative interviews were the main data collection approach used to understand key stakeholders' knowledge, perceptions, and beliefs about early childhood expulsion and suspension practices (Patton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Shavelon & Towne, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were conducted to approach the research questions. That is, a list of questions or issues was prepared to guide the interviews. At the same time, I had a certain degree of freedom to ask follow-up questions and decide sequence and wording of questions in the course of the interview. The advantage of preparing an interview guide/protocol is that the interviewer can efficiently use the limited time available in an interview situation to address issues related to the research questions. The purpose of keeping some degree of freedom during the interviews is to keep them conversational and situational as well as permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated but related to the study purposes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Patton, 2015). Three rounds of interviews were conducted during the course of this study. Administrator interview and teacher interview round #1 were audio-recorded to help me transcribe and analyze data. In addition, detailed field notes were taken during the interviews.

***Administrator interviews.*** Administrators are key stakeholders in decision-making of expulsion and suspension. They oversee the implementation of practices intended to promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors. Therefore, their perspectives are important to furthering our understanding of expulsion and suspension. Each administrator participated in one in-person interview that lasted approximately 88 to 109 minutes. The interviews with the two administrators from Lincoln Child Care Center and with the educational director of Bright Future Child Care took place at their program sites. The educational director of All For One Center preferred to be interviewed in a university conference room. During the interviews, I first collected demographic information using a paper sheet (see

Appendix E for administrator demographic information sheet), after which I used the interview protocol (Appendix F) to guide the conversation. Participants were encouraged to share their views around each conversational topic.

As discussed earlier, several validation strategies were applied for the interview protocols (for both the administrator interview and the teacher interview round #1). Based on the literature review, I outlined conversational topics relevant to the decision-making process of early childhood expulsion and suspension and drafted main questions, probing questions, and follow-up questions. These drafts were discussed with the faculty advisor and revised multiple times before I brought them to an administrator and two teachers to pertain feedback for piloting purposes. After piloting, the faculty advisor and I revisited the protocols again for the final products. Eight conversational topics are included in the interview protocols: background, young children with challenging behaviors, prevention of challenging behaviors, response to challenging behaviors, behavioral intervention strategies, working with families, challenges, and support and professional development.

***Teacher interviews round #1.*** Classroom teachers are directly involved in behavioral incidents that may result in expulsion and suspension practices. They also directly interact with children and implement preventative social-emotional and behavioral support and individualized social-emotional and behavioral intervention. The purpose of this round of interview is to understand teacher's perspectives of expulsion and suspension as well as their decision-making process of exclusionary discipline.

All but two teachers were interviewed individually with each interview lasting from 74 to 101 minutes. Most of the interviews took place at their program sites either in their classrooms or in private conference rooms. Sarah was the only who preferred to be interviewed in a university

conference room. Because of the nature of most child care providers' working schedule, I interviewed the majority of the teacher participants during children's nap time so they could remain in the classroom and not leave the children unattended. Five of the interviews were completed in the scheduled day. With Caroline, Tisha, and Julia, interviews with each of them took place on two days because of limited time allowance during their working hours.

During the interviews, I first collected demographic information by using a form that the interviewees complete (Appendix G). Then I used a similar interview protocol (Appendix H) with the same topics and probes as the administrator interview to guide the conversation.

**Classroom observation and teacher interview round #2.** The purpose of observations was to provide information about teacher-child interaction and practices regarding social emotional support that are or are not being implemented in a classroom. In this study, observations are supplementary data collection activities, mainly used for data triangulation. That is, observations are another source of evidence that assists with evaluating consistency among multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, policies, behavioral incident report). Furthermore, observations are also used to identify professional development needs. One underlying assumption of this study is that it is critical to understand the multidimensional features of expulsion and suspension in order to suggest what to do and how to address the issue. Teachers and their classroom practices regarding promoting social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors have direct impacts on the decision-making of expulsion and suspension (Perry et al., 2008; Vinh et al., 2016). Hence, observations that focus on these practices can provide information about the observed quality of classroom practices and possible need for professional development.

The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT; Hemmeter, Fox, & Snyder, 2014) was purposefully selected for this study. It is a research-validated instrument to measure classroom practices associated with preventative social-emotional and behavioral support and individualized social emotional and behavioral intervention. The TPOT has three subscales. The first subscale addresses 14 key teaching practices related to child social emotional development and behavioral health (see Table 5 for a section of TPOT Subscale 1). In subscale two there are 17 red flags that indicate poor structural and interactional quality in the classroom environment (see Table 6 for the list of red flags). The third subscale addresses use of effective strategies to respond to challenging behavior.

Table 5

*TPOT Subscale 1 Key Practices*

| Item No. | Key Practices   |
|----------|---|
| 1        | Schedules, Routines, and Activities                             |
| 2        | Transitions between Activities are Appropriate                  |
| 3        | Teachers Engage in Supportive Conversations with Children       |
| 4        | Promoting Children's Engagement                                 |
| 5        | Providing Directions  |
| 6        | Collaborative Teaming   |
| 7        | Teaching Behavioral Expectations                                |
| 8        | Teaching Social Skills and Emotional Competencies               |
| 9        | Teaching Friendship Skills                                      |
| 10       | Teaching Children to Express Emotions                           |
| 11       | Teaching Problem Solving  |
| 12       | Interventions for children with Persistent Challenging Behavior |
| 13       | Connecting with Families  |
| 14       | Supporting Family Use of the Pyramid Model Practices            |

Table 6

*TPOT Subscale 2 Red Flags*

| Red Flags   |
|---|
| 15. The majority of the day is spent in teacher-direct activities   |
| 16. Transitions are more often chaotic than not   |
| 17. Teacher talk to children is primarily giving directions   |
| 18. During group activities, many children are not engaged  |
| 19. Teachers are not prepared for activities before the children arrive at the activity   |
| 20. Children are reprimanded for engaging in disruptive or problem behavior (frequent use of "no," "stop," "don't")   |
| 21. Children are threatened with an impending negative consequence that will occur if disruptive or problem persists  |
| 22. Teacher reprimands or admonishes children from expressing their emotions  |
| 23. Emotions are never discussed in the classroom   |
| 24. Teacher rarely encourages interactions between children during play or activities   |
| 25. Teacher gives directions to all children in the same way without giving additional help to children who need more support   |
| 26. Teacher tells children mostly what not to do rather than what to do   |
| 27. Learning centers do not have clear boundaries   |
| 28. There are large, wide-open spaces in the classroom where children can run   |
| 29. Teacher reports asking for the removal of children with persistent challenging behavior from the classroom or program   |
| 30. Teacher makes comments about families that are focused on the challenges presented by families and their lack of interest in being involved   |
| 31. Teacher restrains a child when engaging in problem behavior or secludes the child in an area separate from the classroom where the child cannot see the activities of the classroom |

The administration of the TPOT includes a 2-hour observation and a 15-to-20-minute interview. The observation must cover teacher-directed activities, child-directed activities, and transitions that occur between activities. The TPOT interview is used to understand practices that may not be observed during the 2 hours, to supplement the observation. Scoring takes place after the completion of the observation and interview. In addition, TPOT indicators are scored based on the behavior of all adults in the classroom. When there is a discrepancy between adults, the indicator should be scored based on the lead teacher's behavior. In Anna and Sarah's case, because Sarah was in the classroom longer than Anna and they both agreed upon Sarah's lead teaching role, I scored the indicators based on Sarah's behaviors when there were discrepancies between them two. However, because Taylor and Ellie identify themselves as co-lead, I randomly selected one of them (i.e., Ellie) as the default "lead teacher."

**Observations.** A total of 7 classrooms were observed during the course of this study. I observed six classrooms once. Because the activity span of the first observation day was too short (only 35 minutes), one classroom was observed a second time. Although an ideal TPOT observation would last 2 hours, almost all of the classrooms had instructional activities (i.e., large group, small group, center time) shorter than 2 hours during the day with a large block of time dedicated to outside play, free play, and caring routines (e.g, snack, lunch, potty). Therefore, the duration of the observations ranges from 96 to 140 minutes with some of them shorter than 2 hours.

**Teacher interview round #2.** The second round of teacher interview took place after each TPOT classroom observation. The purpose of this interview was to understand classroom management and teaching practices that may not be observed during the 2-hour observation. The TPOT interview uses standardized open-ended probes (Patton, 2015) and Interviewers use the

exact wording of questions. The researcher should “ask the questions exactly as stated in the scoring form” (TPOT, p.20).

Instead of doing a strict TPOT interview (see Table 7 for sample interview questions of TPOT), this study adopted a more flexible format to open up the interview space for dialogue and clarifications related to the purpose of the study. This decision is justified by the following reasons. First, the purpose of conducting the TPOT is not program evaluation, but identifying professional needs. Therefore, rather than using “yes” or “no” responses, I was able to gain a more in-depth understanding of classroom practices and teachers’ needs. Second, because I only observed the majority of the classrooms once, the information obtained by the observation could be limited. A more conversational interview allowed me to ask clarifying questions and help analyze patterns and themes across different types of data. Hence, the second round of teacher interviews was semi-structured and led by probes from the TPOT assessment. Importantly, almost all the interviews lasted longer than what the recommended 15 to 20 minutes noted in the scoring manual with an average duration of 38 minutes.

Table 7

*An Example of the TPOT Interview Protocol*

| Item 12. Interventions for Children with Persistent Challenging Behavior                 |
|--|
| What do you do when children have severe and persistent challenging behavior?            |
| What Steps do you go through to get support for these children?                          |
| What is your role in the process of developing a behavior plan for these children?       |
| What is your role in implementing the plan? Tell me how you know if the plan is working? |

Ideally, the TPOT interview should be completed on the same day as the observation. However, the majority of the teacher participants were the only childcare provider in their classroom and did not have the spare time to converse with me on the observation day. Nor were they able to do the interview after working hours on the same day. In addition, because most of the interviews took place during children's nap time, when there was an incident of a child not being able to sleep or waking up in the middle of an interview, the teacher and I had to reschedule another day to complete the conversation. For both Susan and Caroline, it took three times to finish the interview, respectively on the observation day, a day later, and five days later. In addition, as discussed earlier, because Victoria's classroom was observed twice on two consecutive days and she had a shorter working schedule on the second day when she had no time for the interview, her scoring was based on the interview that happened on the first day and the observation that occurred a day later.

Researchers often need to flexibly adjust activities in authentic settings to meet the needs of the observed classrooms. Teachers are charged to meet the needs of children first, and researchers must find a way to gather information that maps onto setting limitations. To a certain extent, the rigor of TPOT including both the observation and the interview was comprised under the real-world circumstances of child care. However, efforts were made to ensure both the reliability and validity of these observations. These efforts included me attending a TPOT training and being certified as a reliable scorer, employing a second observer for inter-rater reliability, scoring in a timely manner, and inviting participants to audit the scorings.

**Policy, regulation, and behavioral incident report.** These documents are important data sources of this study because they are part of the exosystem that informs expulsion and suspension decision-making (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Longstreth et al., 2013).



The joint policy statement on early childhood expulsion and suspension provides two policy and data collection recommendations to early childhood programs: (a) “establishing preventive, disciplinary, suspension, and expulsion policies and administering those policies free of bias and discrimination; and (b) setting goals and using data to monitor progress in preventing, severely limiting, and ultimately eliminating expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings” (U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services & U.S. Department of Education, 2014, p.1). These recommendations are made based on the research evidence that programs that do not have established policies are more likely to use expulsion and suspension practices (Gilliam, 2005; Perry et al., 2011). Therefore, program policies, regulations, behavioral incident reports, and other related documents are critical artifacts that indicate what teachers and programs are guided to do when presented with challenging behaviors.

Based on the research evidence showing that various policy and infrastructure factors have impacts on expulsion and suspension practices, I invited the participating programs to share the following artifacts if any (Appendix I): (a) documents related to behavioral policies/plans/guidelines, data that indicate annual numbers of expulsion and suspension by class, teacher, and children’s gender, race, and disability; (b) policies that provide guidance of teacher-child ratio, classroom size, and lengths of school day; (c) policies that are related with establishing developmentally appropriate social-emotional and behavioral health promotion practices; (d) policies that provide guidance on what teachers and programs will do when presented with challenging behaviors (e.g., response, communication, consultation); and (e) policies that provide guidance of the use of expulsion and suspension practices.

### **Data Analyses**

Mixed methods inquiries should be creative and the interpretation of the meanings of the

mix should align with the conceptual framing of the inquiry (Greene, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Based on the conceptual framing and the research purposes of this study, the aim of the data analytical plan is to: (a) assess patterns of interrelationship, connections, and differences in data; and (b) generate valid and trustworthy conclusions and inferences as to the findings.

Specifically, analysis for each method, whether quantitative or qualitative, first followed the procedures of each methodological tradition (Greene, 2007). For example, qualitative data (e.g., data obtained from interviews and documents) were analyzed qualitatively; scored data collected through structured observations were analyzed descriptively. These descriptive data were then transformed into narratives and included with qualitative data in thematic or pattern analysis (data transformation; Caracelli & Greene, 1993). Based on the qualitative analysis and the descriptive analysis, I further investigated patterns of commonality and difference, based on which conclusions and inferences were generated. The following sections discuss the unit of analysis, data analysis following the procedures of each methodological tradition, data transformation, and data consolidation for conclusions and inferences (Greene, 2007).

**Unit of analysis.** In this study, each program is treated as a unit of analysis (case). Each case (program) has different working parts (e.g., policy, infrastructure, classroom) that together construct the multidimensional features of expulsion and suspension (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Gillham, 2000; Yin, 2018).

Treating each program as a unit of analysis has several advantages. First, although exclusionary discipline practice (expulsion and suspension) is the general phenomenon shared by all programs, each program has its unique history, contexts, and characteristics. Concentrating on each program enables a more in-depth understanding of the complex nature of expulsion and suspension (Stake 2006; Yin, 2018). Second, because of the uniqueness of each program,

professional development needs may differ from program to program and thus should be analyzed on an individual basis (Benedict et al., 2007). Third, treating each program as a unit of analysis allows analyses across units (cases) to discover the more generalized findings, either similar or different, across programs (Stake, 2006). The process of both within-case and across-case analyses is shown in Figure 4 and demonstrated in the following sections.

**Qualitative analysis.** Qualitative analysis was used to analyze data obtained from artifacts (e.g., policy, behavioral incident report) and interviews. All artifacts and interview transcripts were treated as texts and content analysis was the primary procedure used to discover patterns and themes (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). Content analysis is defined as an analytical approach that identifies core consistencies and meanings of a volume of qualitative material through qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort (Patton, 2015; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005). The goal of content analysis is to identify patterns and themes. Themes are categorical and topical findings. For example, a topic might be discussed several times by different interviewees regardless of whether they share a common position on the topic or not. Patterns are more descriptive findings that are shared by multiple sentences, paragraphs, and sections in one document or across several documents (Patton, 2015).

Treating each program as a unit of analysis, I started with coding the administrator interview transcript to identify themes and patterns. Several coding methods were used either simultaneously or consequentially during the coding process. Descriptive coding was applied to summarize in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data (Miles et al., 2014; Saldana, 2016). Because descriptive coding only assists with identifications of topic, not in-depth analyses of the content, I used descriptive coding to select other coding methods based on the identified topics. For example, in-vivo coding was used to analyze participants'

perspectives of certain topics, such as challenging behaviors and children with challenging behaviors. In-vivo coding uses a word or short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record as a code to represent the participants voices and perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Saldana, 2016). Value coding was applied to reflect a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs (Gable & Wolf, 1993; Saldana, 2016). This was particularly useful to analyze passages related with participants' evaluations of the effectiveness of behavioral prevention and intervention strategies as well as their attitudes towards children with challenging behaviors as well as their families. In addition, I used procedural coding methods to analyze all incidents leading to a decision of expulsion or suspension. This coding method assists in answering "why" questions by extracting factors involved prior to, during, and after the decision making of expulsion and suspension practices (Saldana, 2016).

In summary, the above coding methods occurred during the first cycle of data analyses with a goal to summarize segments of data for thematic and pattern coding. The same process was repeated with document analyses (see Table 8 for a list of documents received), the first round of teacher interviews, and the second round of teacher interviews.

**Descriptive analysis.** Descriptive analysis was used to analyze observational data (see Table 9 for TPOT descriptive report). The three subscales of the TPOT were all developed to measure classroom practices associated with preventative social-emotional and behavioral support and individualized social-emotional and behavioral intervention. Under each practice item, there are several indicators that can be scored either *Yes* (indicating the practice described was observed or reported to be implemented) or *No* (indicating the practice was neither observed nor described). After scoring each indicator, data were analyzed in the following ways to indicate challenges and professional development needs (research questions 5 and 6).

Table 8

*Documents Received*

| Category  | Lincoln | Bright Future | All for One |
|---|---------|---------------|-------------|
| Behavioral Policies/Plans/Guidelines            | ✓       | ✓             | N/A         |
| Classroom Ratio, Size, and Lengths of           | ✓       | ✓             | ✓           |
| <sup>School Day</sup><br>Teacher Qualifications | ✓       | ✓             | ✓           |
| Expulsion and Suspension Records                | N/A     | N/A           | N/A         |
| Behavioral Incident Report                      | N/A     |               | N/A         |
| Curriculum                                      | ✓       | ✓             | N/A         |
| Professional Development Plan                   | N/A     | N/A           | N/A         |
| Employment Guidance                             | ✓       | ✓             | ✓           |
| Family Handbook                                 | ✓       | ✓             | ✓           |
| Others  | ✓       | ✓             | ✓           |

Notes: N/A= Program does not have such documents.

Table 9

*TPOT Descriptive Scores*

| Classroom     | SS1 (%) |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |       |    | SS2<br>(N.) | SS3 |     |     |
|---------------|---------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|----|-------------|-----|-----|-----|
|               | 1       | 2     | 3     | 4     | 5     | 6     | 7     | 8     | 9     | 10    | 11    | 12    | 13    | 14 |             | 3-1 | 3-2 | 3-3 |
| 1             | 20.00   | 12.50 | 55.56 | 11.11 | 28.57 | 44.44 | 0     | 0     | 11.11 | 0     | 0     | 0     | 62.50 | 0  | 8           | N   | N   | N   |
| 2             | 30.00   | 75.00 | 66.67 | 55.56 | 28.57 | 44.44 | 0     | 0     | 0     | 37.50 | 0     | 20.00 | 25.00 | 0  | 7           | Y   | N   | N   |
| 3             | 30.00   | 62.50 | 60.00 | 44.44 | 28.57 | -     | 0     | 50.00 | 22.22 | 75.00 | 11.11 | 0     | 50.00 | 0  | 6           | Y   | N   | N   |
| Lincoln       | 26.67   | 50    | 60.47 | 37.04 | 28.57 | 44.44 | 0     | 16.67 | 11.11 | 37.50 | 3.70  | 6.67  | 45.83 | 0  | 7           | -   | -   | -   |
| 4             | 77.78   | 75.00 | 88.89 | 87.50 | 71.43 | 44.44 | 28.47 | 37.50 | 55.56 | 75.00 | 22.22 | 0     | 62.50 | 0  | 0           | -   | -   | -   |
| 5             | 80.00   | 87.50 | 66.67 | 77.78 | 85.71 | -     | 14.29 | 0     | 11.11 | 50.00 | 11.11 | 0     | 50.00 | 0  | 4           | N   | N   | N   |
| Bright Future | 78.89   | 81.25 | 77.78 | 82.64 | 78.47 | 44.44 | 21.43 | 18.75 | 33.33 | 62.50 | 16.67 | 0     | 78.89 | 0  | 2           | -   | -   | -   |
| 6             | 50.00   | 25.00 | 66.67 | 77.78 | 14.29 | 77.78 | 0     | 12.50 | 11.11 | 37.50 | 0     | 0     | 50.00 | 0  | 5           | Y   | Y   | N   |
| 7             | 60.00   | 62.50 | 40.00 | 33.33 | 42.86 | 87.50 | 0     | 0     | 11.11 | 37.50 | 0     | 0     | 0     | 0  | 6           | Y   | Y   | N   |
| All for One   | 55.00   | 43.75 | 53.33 | 55.56 | 28.57 | 82.64 | 0     | 6.25  | 11.11 | 37.50 | 0     | 0     | 25.00 | 0  | 6           | -   | -   | -   |
| Total         | 49.68   | 57.14 | 63.49 | 55.36 | 42.86 | 59.72 | 6.12  | 14.29 | 17.46 | 44.64 | 6.35  | 2.86  | 42.86 | 0  | 5           | -   | -   | -   |

Notes: %=Percentage score of the number of indicators scored *Yes*, dividing by the number of indicators scored either *Yes* or *No*;  
 N=Essential Subscale 3 strategies scored *No*; N.=Number of red flags scored *Yes*; SS1=Key Practices; SS2=Red Flags;  
 SS3=Interventions to Address Challenging Behaviors; Y=Essential Subscale 3 Strategies scored *Yes*.

**Analyzing subscale 1 data.** Subscale 1 has 14 key teaching practices related with children's social emotional development and behavioral health. Percentage scores were calculated by summing the number of indicators scored *Yes* for a key practice item, dividing by the number of indicators scored either *Yes* or *No*, and multiplying this result by 100.

**Analyzing subscale 2 data.** Red flags indicating poor structural and interactional quality that need immediate attention were identified individually because each red flag that is scored *No* indicates immediate needs for support and change.

**Analyzing subscale 3 data.** This subscale is directly related with using effective strategies to respond to challenging behavior. Three essential strategies are identified (developmentally appropriate responses to challenging behaviors, emphasizing behavioral expectations, and positive feedback to appropriate behaviors) and each was scored as *Yes* or *No*.

**Data transformation.** During this process, descriptive data obtained through observations were transformed into narrative and coded using thematic and pattern analysis (Greene, 2007). The quantitative data transformation process involved examining TPOT scorings across participants, subscales, indicators, and items to generate thematic narratives. Narratives describing Red Flags were directly adopted to describe a teacher's classroom practices. For example, "emotions are never discussed in the classroom." For each indicator of subscale 1 and each strategy of subscale 3, I wrote commendations and recommendations for each classroom based on their scorings (see Appendix J for an example). Commendations for Ellie and Taylor in the indicator of "Schedules, Routines, and Activities" included: "1. There was a balance between teacher-directed and child-led activities; and 2. Teacher only continues with teacher-directed activities when children are engaged." Recommendations for these two teachers in the same indicator were: "1. Create visual representation of daily activity schedule; and 2. Use the visual

schedule to prepare, review, and adjust children's day." It is important to note that the commendations were given based on the items scored "yes" and recommendations were based on the items scored "no", all of which were transferred into narratives for further content analysis.

Besides generating narratives for each classroom's TPOT scoring, I also compared data across items, indicators, participants, and programs to write more conclusive narratives (Appendix K). For example, across items and participants, I found that individualizing instructional activities is a shared struggle by all participants. Across participants and programs, it was apparent that the lowest scoring often occurred with three indicators: interventions for children with persistent challenging behaviors, connecting with families, and supporting families. These narratives were critical as they described the practices being used in childcare classrooms, enabled data consolidation of all data, and served an important role for data triangulation.

**Data consolidation.** In the last stage of mixed methods analysis patterns of interrelationship, connections, and differences in data, are identified to support the generation of conclusions and inferences (Creswell, 2013; Greene, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010). At this stage, data were analyzed thematically with three cycles of analysis: creating within-case codes, revising codes across cases, and identifying themes and patterns across cases (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Seidman, 2013).

During the first cycle of analyses, I aggregated and ordered codes of all data sources pertaining to each individual case. For instance, when I developed codes for Lincoln Child Care Center, I analyzed the administrator interview with Elizabeth and Chloe, the teacher interviews with Caroline, Susan, and Victoria, TPOT observations in the teachers' classrooms, and



documents that the program shared with me. Although semi-structured interviews were seen as the primary data source of this study, other data sources might be prioritized based on the research question. For example, to answer Research Questions 2 – *how do early educators promote children’s social emotional development and address challenging behaviors*, it was important to attend to both the interviews as well as the TPOT observations.

Once each case has its own set of codes generated based on all data sources, I coded data across cases by research questions (Stake, 2006). The primary strategy used here was “data gathering across cases” (Stake, 2006, pp. 30-33). I first compared codes across cases to examine whether the existing codes were coherent across cases and if not, what additional codes needed to be created or whether some codes should be combined or eliminated. Following this step, I used a data matrix to display all codes and cluster them by research questions (Miles et al., 2014). In this matrix, I also noted the case attributes of each code: (a)  $X_1$  represents that the code X was only unique to Case 1, Lincoln Child Care Center, (b)  $Y_{2,3}$  indicates that the code Y emerged in data of both Bright Future Child Care and All for One Center, and (c)  $Z_{1,2,3}$  refers to the fact that the code Z emerged in analyzing all three cases (Table 10).

The last step of data consolidation was “merging case findings” (Stake, 2006; pp.58-63). With all data coded and organized with the matrix, I conducted across-case thematic/pattern analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Pattern coding is a process where codes are further condensed and clustered into a smaller number of categories and themes to merge case findings. Using the same matrix, I categorized the codes under each research question and used a phrase or sentence to describe the salient information (Table 10). In addition, data segments were identified to support each theme. During the identification process, I paid particular attention to confirm themes

Table 10

*Data Matrix*

| Research Question  | Theme  | Theme Definition  | Code  |
|--|--|---|---|
| 1. How do early educators (i.e. administrators and teachers) describe their understanding of and feelings about the challenging behaviors of young children? | Theme 1: Identifications of Challenging Behavior | Codes in this theme relate to how child care providers identify and define challenging behaviors and children with challenging behaviors  | 1.1. Topography<br>1.1.1 External behavior <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.1.2 Internal behavior <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.2 Prevalence <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.3 Interfering and threatening other children <sup>1,2,3</sup>   |
|  | Theme 2: Attribution of Challenging Behavior     | Codes in this theme connect to how child care providers reason the cause of challenging behaviors   | 1.4 Attributes<br>1.4.1 "Home environment" <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.4.2 "Seeking for attention" <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.4.3 Developmental stage <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.4.4 "Neurological" <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.4.5 "Medical" <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>1.4.6 School environment <sup>2</sup><br>1.4.7 Gender <sup>1,3</sup><br>1.4.8 Curriculum and instructional activities <sup>2</sup><br>1.4.9 Relationship with the teacher <sup>2</sup>  |
| 2. How do early educators promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors?   | Theme 3: Prevention of Challenging Behaviors     | Codes in this theme relate to practices preventative strategies used to proactively prevent challenging behaviors and teach social emotional skills as well as child care providers' perceived effectiveness of behavioral prevention | 2.1 Prevention or Teaching Strategies<br>2.1.1 Differentiations and modifications <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>2.1.2 Classroom rules, schedules, and organizations <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>2.1.3 Building relationship or "Kill with kindness" <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>2.1.4 Teaching social emotional skills <sup>2</sup><br>2.1.5 Offer choices <sup>2</sup><br>2.1.6 Teacher competence <sup>2</sup><br>2.1.7 Curriculum enrichment <sup>2, 3</sup><br>2.2 Attitudes toward prevention<br>2.2.1 Positive <sup>2</sup><br>2.2.2 Uncertain <sup>1,3</sup><br>2.3 Factors that affect effectiveness <sup>1,3</sup> |
|  | Theme 4: Response to Challenging Behaviors       | Codes in this theme relate to practices used during and following an incident of challenging behaviors  | 3.1 Responsive Strategies<br>3.1.1 Time-out <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>3.1.2 Parent Involvement <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>3.1.3 "Talk with the kiddo" <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>3.1.4 Administrator step-in <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>3.1.5 Calm down strategies <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>3.1.6 Removal of toys and activities <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>3.1.7 Moving children to another classroom <sup>1,3</sup><br>3.1.8 Differential reinforcement <sup>2</sup><br>3.1.9 "Taking data" <sup>2,3</sup><br>3.1.10 Involvement of police <sup>1</sup>  |
| 3. In what situations are expulsion and suspension reported as   | Theme 5: In School Suspension                    | Codes in this theme relate the incidents of in school   | 4.1 ISS incidents/"Out of control"<br>4.1.1 "Causing harm" <sup>1,2,3</sup><br>4.1.2 "I don't know what to do" <sup>1,2,3</sup>   |

|  |   |  |  |
|--|---|--|--|
| used or considered for use?  |   | suspensions and decision making factors  | 4.1.3 Children with autism <sub>3</sub><br>4.2. Factors affecting the use of ISS<br>4.2.1 Administrator <sub>1,2,3</sub>   |
|  | Theme 6:<br>Out of School Suspension                  | Codes in this theme relate the incidents of out of suspensions and decision making factors   | 5.1 OSS incidents<br>5.1.1 "Dangerous" behaviors <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>5.1.2 "Prolonged" history <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>5.1.3 "Wake up call" <sub>3</sub><br>5.1.4 "Indecent" <sub>3</sub>  |
|  | Theme 7:<br>Expulsion                                 | Codes in this theme relate the incidents of expulsion and decision making factors  | 6.1 Expulsion incidents<br>6.1.1 Families <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>6.1.2 "Extreme" behaviors <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>6.2 Factors affecting the use/not use of expulsion<br>6.2.1 Policy <sub>1,2,3</sub>  |
| 4. How do early educators perceive expulsion and suspension?   | Theme 8:<br>Effectiveness of Expulsion and Suspension | Codes in this theme relate to how child care providers define the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline and their perceived effectiveness of expulsion and suspension                                 | 4.3 Effectiveness of ISS <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>4.3.1 Addressing “fairness” for other children <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>4.3.2 Addressing behaviors<br>4.3.2.1 Effective <sub>1,3</sub><br>4.3.2.1 Not effective <sub>2,3</sub><br>5.2 Effectiveness of OSS <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>5.2.1 Protecting other children <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>5.2.2 Addressing behaviors<br>5.2.2.1 Not effective <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>5.2.3 Addressing families<br>5.2.3.1 Effective <sub>1,3</sub><br>5.2.3.2 Not effective <sub>1,3</sub><br>6.3 Effectiveness of expulsion <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>6.3.1 Addressing families<br>6.3.1.1 Effective <sub>1,3</sub>   |
| 5. What challenges do early educators report encountering in promoting social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors?  | Theme 9:<br>Challenges and Needs                      | Codes in the theme connect to challenges and professional development needs that child care providers have in order to promote children’s social emotional development and address challenging behaviors | 7.1 Parents <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.1.1 "Parents in denial" <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.1.2 Parents not helping <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.1.3 Parent communication <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.1.4 Home environment <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.2 Workforce <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.2.1 Lack of competency <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.2.2 Lack of professional development <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.2.2.1 Lack of state training <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.2.2.2 Lack of coaching <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.3 Profession <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.3.1 State policy <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.3.2 Work schedule and work load <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.3.3 Lack of staff and high turnover <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>7.3.4 Payment <sub>2,3</sub><br>7.3.5 Profession not being respected <sub>2,3</sub><br>8.1 Professional development opportunities <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>8.1.1 Training <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>8.1.2 “Modeling” <sub>1,3</sub><br>8.1.2 “Strategies” <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>8.2. Profession support <sub>1,2,3</sub><br>8.2.1 Public attention <sub>2,3</sub><br>8.2.2 Administrator support <sub>1,2</sub> |
| 6. What professional development supports do early educators report needing in order to better promote children’ social emotional development and address challenging behaviors? |   |  |  |

generated by more than one data collection methods (e.g., administrator interview, teacher interview round #1, classroom observation).

### **Trustworthiness**

The credibility of the findings and interpretations of a mixed-method design study depends on the careful attention to establishing trustworthiness (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Miles et al., 2014). To enhance the trustworthiness of this study, I employed the following strategies during the course of this study: (a) data triangulation, (b) Interviewer triangulation, (c) analytic memoing, (d) member checking, and (e) enhancing my own credibility.

### **Data Triangulation**

One goal of this study is to understand the decision-making process of expulsion and suspension by attending to different voices. Therefore, using a variety of data sources in a study assists with establishing the trustworthiness and gaining a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest (Brantlinger et al., 2005; Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015; Stake, 2006). Data obtain from divergent yet similar cases, interviews with multiple stakeholders, classroom observations, and artifacts were triangulated throughout the data collection and analysis process. For example, Samantha indicated that she was barely involved in incidents of “a child being removed to another classroom because of challenging behaviors.” Nonetheless, teachers from different classrooms helped out one another and agreed upon “having your child in my class for a little bit if you can’t handle it.” Therefore, “temporarily removing a child from one classroom to another because of behavioral concerns” was further probed during the interviews with teachers.

Another example is triangulation across data collection methods. Teacher reported classroom practices were triangulated during classroom observations. Requirements written in

the program documents related with addressing and intervening challenging behaviors were triangulated during interviews and classroom observations. Data triangulation enhances the trustworthiness of this study and also assists in seeking both convergence and divergence across data sources.

### **Interviewer Triangulation**

Interviewer triangulation is also labeled peer debriefing, during which a researcher and an impartial peer engage in extensive discussions about study design and ongoing study findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2012). Throughout different stages of this study, I met weekly to biweekly with my faculty advisor to discuss a variety of issues related to the study. For instance, we experienced several rounds of revising and revisiting the interview protocols before they were used to guide interview conversations. We also engaged in discussions around how to transform quantitative data to qualitative data in a more meaningful way that allows data consolidation. Because English is not my first language, to accurately interpret data, particularly folk or indigenous terms, we reviewed all transcripts together and the faculty advisor helped to formalize and explain those terms within the interview contexts. Last, the faculty advisor also contributed to study trustworthiness by being engaged in discussions about codes, themes, and their correspondence with the research questions.

### **Analytic Memoing**

Following each data collection activity, I wrote analytic memos in my research journal to document my reflections and thinking processes about the data (Miles et al., 2014; Patton, 2015). According to Charmaz and Bryant (2008), memo writing serves several critical functions including “engages researchers with their data and emerging comparative analyses, helps them to identify analytic gaps, provides material for sections of papers and chapters, and encourages

researchers to record and develop their ideas at each stage of the research project” (p. 375). In addition to these functions, analytic memoing also provides a record that can be reviewed as a means of checking one’s biases and assumptions. For instance, the education director, Allison, of Bight Future Child Care, and I share some similar background training and experiences in terms of positive behavior support models. Through analytic memoing, I realized that during the interview, I tended to agree with Allison more and encourage her to share more about her positive experiences related with preventing and addressing challenging behaviors, whereas when interviewing other administrators, I probed more of their use of non-evidence-based practices and used less “in-favor” statements. Ongoing analytic memoing along with my own reflexivity enabled me to be aware and stay alert to my own biases to intentionally address those biases during data collection and data analysis as a means of enhancing the study trustworthiness.

### **Member Checking**

Member checking actively involves research participants in reviewing and confirming the accuracy or inaccuracy of data interpretation (Brantlinger, et al., 2004; Yin, 2018). It provides participants opportunities to offer feedback on developing findings as a means of enhancing study trustworthiness. Member checking was strategically embedded at specific points of data collection and analysis. First, all salient information was reiterated during the interviews to confirm the participants’ responses and evaluate the accuracy of interpretations. In addition, after the interviews were transcribed, all participants were invited to give feedback to their interview transcription and were provided a second opportunity to confirm, clarify, or adjust their responses. Moreover, all participants were given a report of their TPOT scoring, which allowed them to provide more feedback to data interpretation.

## **Enhancing the Researcher's Credibility**

A fifth strategy to enhance study trustworthiness is to enhance my own credibility as the researcher (Patton, 2015). I am the primary research instrument of this qualitative-oriented mixed-methods design study and thus my credibility is key to the research quality. Throughout the study, I sought to address both the improvement of my own research competence and also an accountability system to support a high standard for study quality. This was achieved by having regular meetings and discussions with my faculty advisor to solve the encountered challenges. I also attended a training session on TPOT (Hemmeter et al., 2014) and was certified as a reliable scorer before the stage of data collection. A committee member, who was a TPOT trainer, and I observed 29% of the classrooms together, which yielded an average inter-observer agreement of 89%.

## **Conclusion**

This study applies a mixed-method design to understand the complex issue of early childhood expulsion and suspension. A mixed-method design is appropriate because: (a) the conceptualization of this study involves a plurality of philosophical paradigms, (b) the complex nature of early childhood expulsion and suspension requires the use of multiple data sources and multiple data collection methods in the same inquiry space, and (c) this research design allows an in-depth and contextualized understanding of the phenomenon of interest.

In this chapter, I first introduced the theoretical assumptions and conceptual framework of this study. This was followed by defining key terms and describing the different data collection methods. I then described how data were analyzed, transformed, and consolidated for generating study results. In the end, I discussed how study trustworthiness was address throughout the study.

## **Chapter 4 Results**

In this chapter, I address the research questions presenting the thematic findings. In each section, the findings are discussed across cases highlighting the shared patterns followed by a discussion of any individual case findings while unique to that case were found to be particularly meaningful to understanding the research question and/or theme. The three critical factors affecting the use of early childhood exclusionary discipline noted in the literature review - practices, perceptions, and challenges - serve as an organizing structure for the thematic findings. Thus, the first section addresses childcare providers' perceptions of children's challenging behaviors in terms of how they define and attribute behaviors that are challenging. The second section reports findings related to the two broad approaches, preventative and reactive strategies, used to address challenging behaviors and promote children's social emotional development. The next two sections examine childcare providers' practices and perceptions in regard to the use of exclusionary discipline (i.e., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion). The final section concludes with an analysis of the challenges that childcare providers face and their needs for professional development related to children's challenging behaviors and promoting positive social emotional development.

### **Childcare Providers' Perceptions of Challenging Behaviors**

The results presented in this section respond to the first research question: How do early educators (i.e. administrators and teachers) describe their understanding of and feelings about the challenging behaviors of young children? Two themes were identified through data analysis: (a) identification of challenging behaviors and (b) attributions of challenging behaviors. These two themes emerged primarily through analyses of the interview transcriptions.



## Theme #1: Identification of Challenging Behavior

Across cases, childcare providers including administrators and teachers reported that they encountered challenging behaviors of young children on a daily basis. Interestingly, the majority of participants used the number of children with challenging behaviors rather than the number of incidents to identify the prevalence of challenging behaviors. For example, in response to “*How often do challenging behaviors happen in your program,*” Chloe from Lincoln Child Care Center shared, “*I would say every classroom has one to two challenging children that disrupt the classroom. I recall one year I had eight. That was the year that I had about 28 kids total enrolled.*” In addition to the administrators, interviews with the teachers also revealed a similar pattern. Below is an excerpt of Susan’s response to a question on the types of challenging behaviors that she must address on a daily basis.

Well as you can see, I have ten boys and five girls. Four of the boys that I have, they wear me out. They feed off of each other... Then you’ve got my autistic kid. I’ve got my three-year-old. Neither of those are those four boys. That’s already six boys. I’m keeping count. Then I’ve got the one who’s in – the mom’s got him in so many different therapies, behavioral management, medication doctors and things like that.

The participants were also asked to share the kinds of behaviors they found challenging. The behaviors directly named or in some conversations indirectly described included a wide range of child behaviors but foremost were external behaviors. These behaviors include physical aggression, (e.g., Allison said, “*. . . physically aggressive towards him or herself, aggressive towards adults, aggressive towards peers*”), verbal aggression (e.g., Ellie said, “*There was a little girl [who] threatened to kill people. She threatened to kill herself*”), self-injury (e.g., Elizabeth said, “*I feel the biggest one [challenge] is when a child could possibly hurt themselves.*

*Like standing in a windowsill...and smashing their own head into the floor”*), property destruction (e.g., Chloe said, *“Trashing the office, throwing equipment. This child was literally throwing the computer on the floor in the office. Tipping over filing cabinet”*), “non-listening”/noncompliance (e.g., Ellie said, *“She won’t eat, she won’t sleep, she refuses to use the restroom”*), and tantrum (e.g., Sarah, *“...children that cry more than you would expect”*).

Even though these identified external behaviors represent a wide range of topographies, they all share some similar features across cases that make them challenging. That is, such behaviors negatively affect the interests of other children, staff, and/or the classroom/program (e.g., putting “somebody in harms’ way”). The following excerpt from Caroline’s interview illustrates her response to examples of children’s behaviors that are found challenging.

Caroline: I had 3 kids . . . I couldn’t handle all 3 and still give attention to the others.

Since they have been out of my room, I have seen so many kids blossom.

Interviewer: What were some challenging behaviors that the 3 of them had?

Caroline: Hurting people. Besides not listening and pretty much all of the above.

Not cleaning up, going from center to center, and not doing their fair share of cleaning up that center before they went to another center...

Interviewer: I want to follow up ... You said that after the 3 children left, others in your classroom became more successful. Can you tell me more about this? Why do you think the other kids did better [without the three children]?

Caroline: Sure. We use a program called Handwriting Without Tears, which the public schools here use... A lot of that kind of thing got cut short when I was dealing with the kids who had to be dealt with. I couldn’t do anything else. Also, the whole feeling of the classroom changed... Our director said,

“This is not fair to the other kids.” ... A lot of them were scared of the other children, of the challenging children...A lot of them would say, “I am scared, Ms. Caroline. Please help me.”

Interviewer: What was going on when they said, “I am scared?” What was happening?

Caroline: They got hurt, they got chased, they would get their art projects taken away and ripped up. They were basically mistreated by and threatened. There was a threatening feeling in my room.

Another set of behaviors identified by the participants as challenging are internal, which were noted much less frequently than external behaviors. In response to “*Please share some more examples of challenging behaviors,*” Chloe shared, “*Mentally reserved from everyone.*” Elizabeth followed up, “*Unstable, very shy, within themselves.*” Another example brought up by Anna was, “*Children that cry more than you would expect them to cry or just cry and you don’t know the reason. Children that are just sad or they’ll be upset and they can’t tell you why.*” These examples indicate another factor affecting teachers’ identification of challenging behaviors. That is, “*I have no idea.*” In other words, challenging behaviors to many teachers are behaviors that they do not know how to deal with or understand the reasons behind them.

To summarize, a wide range of children’s behaviors both external and internal were identified by childcare providers as challenging. The challenging aspects of external behaviors were primarily characterized by their harmfulness to the interests of others (i.e., other children and teachers) and organizations (i.e., classroom and school). Internal behaviors were perceived challenging by childcare providers because of their lack of understanding of such behaviors.

## **Theme #2: Attribution of Challenging Behavior**

Across cases, childcare providers shared many similar views regarding the attributions of

challenging behaviors. The most commonly discussed reasons behind children's challenging behaviors can be grouped into two categories: family-related factors and child-related factors.

**Family-related factors.** Family-related factors were the most consistently reported reason for children's challenging behaviors. In fact, all thirteen childcare providers attributed challenging behaviors to family-related factors. Some even stated that it is "*the first thing that comes to mind*" in response to reasons for children engaging in challenging behaviors. In response to the interviewer's question, Chloe said, "*I would say, first thing that comes to my mind is home environment.*" Elizabeth said, "*Turmoil at home.*"

Samantha first said, "*For the majority of our families I would say the problem behaviors come from a chaotic home environment.*" She then recalled an incident of a four-year-old girl exhibiting challenging behaviors.

She is having problems, and we called her mother in. The first thing I asked was, 'Tell me about what is going on at home.' She [Mom] explained the chaos that was going on, dad was in prison, dad got out, dad taught her to be a thug. So, her brother was beating up on her sister and then her sister beating up on her. And you've got a mom that's worked 8 hours, she's exhausted.

Samantha concluded her narratives on this incident by saying, "*It is really the chaotic home environment at some kids' houses* [that result in children's challenging behaviors]."

Caroline shared a similar incident detailing why she was sure that the home was to blame.

His dad was in prison for drug possession or selling...He [this child] had challenges because of his dad. He [his dad] wasn't divorced from his mom. They were separated. Then, after that, dad went to prison. After that, he gets out of prison. Then, the woman that he is with before he is in prison beats him to the point of almost killing him.

Smashing his head against the curb... There was a lot of drama in his life. Then, right after he got out of that situation, now his girlfriend is pregnant. Think about that.

These examples represent a group of participant responses in which they attribute children's challenging behaviors to "dysfunctional" and "chaotic" home environments. However, their responses did not explicitly explain why they thought a dysfunctional home environment would cause children's challenging behaviors. Another group of participants provided further thoughts as to their reasoning regarding why children from "chaotic" home environments might then engage in challenging behaviors. These explanations included inconsistency within the home environment and inconsistency between school and home environments.

An explanation of inconsistency within the home environment can be seen in the following narrative from Sarah as she describes a child who engaged in physical aggressions.

Her parents are not together. They are separated ... You have one parent who is just like, whatever, let him keep fighting and punching each other. Then, the other parent is like, no, we are not doing that. So, the parents are not together. Then, she [the child] brings that to school and her home environment is not the same as school. So, they are not going to be on the same page if the parent is not on the same page at home and school are not the same, then, of course, she is all over the place... She is my number one concern in my class, to be honest. Just because her home life is not great.

Inconsistency between school and home as an explanation for children's challenging behaviors was also noted by other participants. Tisha's excerpt below illustrates this perspective.

Interviewer: You said they [challenging behaviors] usually happen because of the inconsistency between home and school?

Tisha: Yes, in some trainings I've been to, it always stood out to me that kids who came from kind of dysfunctional homes or with drama or something always going on, when they come into this calm classroom and environment, some kids can't handle it. They bring their noise and their drama into the classroom and they have to get things going to spice it up, because it's too quiet and calm for them. Basically saying the kids that come from chaos bring the chaos into the classroom, because calmness is not a safe feeling for them. They're safer in that other type of area.

Interviewer: So, they're not used to this environment.

Tisha: They're not used to it at all, and it takes them more time to adjust.

In addition, as participants described what they meant by home environment concerns, there was a shared consensus that children engage in challenging behaviors because families either value or engage in practices and activities that were not the same as those of the school or teachers. In the excerpt below, Allison shared her perspectives that parents do not value or support children's social emotional development.

Allison: I think a lot of it is that we don't put the focus as parents on teaching social emotional stability with children. There is still a heavy push for learning your ABCs, learning to count, read before you go to kindergarten.

Interviewer: So, are you saying in the home environment parents do not usually teach their kids social and emotional skills?

Allison: Yes. [But] I think we are moving in that direction. I think we are creating an awareness of how important and crucial that is in development. But I think without that education and without continuing the push for that

knowledge [and without] sending home parent activities that support those skills, that's why we see some of the things [challenging behaviors].

Finally, several of the participants commented on family practices/activities that they believed directly link to children's observational learning of challenging behaviors. For example, Julia commented on the effects of video games on children's challenging behaviors.

Julia: I think a lot of it is what parents have the kids watch at home and video games. Because I notice even just years after years being a teacher, it seems like it gets more and more violent in the classrooms.

In summary, data reflects that participants identified family-related factors as a primary reason for children's challenging behaviors. Further analyses of the data showed that "inconsistency" plays a key role in participants' reasoning in terms of their opinions about the causal relationship between family-related factors and children's challenging behaviors. That is, the inconsistency within the home environments, the inconsistency between home and school environments, and the inconsistency between home and school practices are seen by the participants as potentially leading to challenging behaviors of young children.

**Child-related factors.** Another consistent response to "*why children engage in challenging behaviors*" is related to factors centering on the child. These factors expressed by participants include neurological reasons, medical reasons, children's age, and attention seeking behaviors. Within this category, the most frequently identified child-related factor by the participants was neurological reasons or "born that way." Most of the participants shared their views that there are connections between challenging behaviors and disability diagnoses. For instance, when explaining her understanding of behavioral attributions, Caroline said, "[Some children with challenging behaviors are] *just born that way. Some kids are born with fetal*

*alcohol syndrome. Some kids were born addicted to drugs. Some kids were born with cerebral palsy, with other deficits like that.*” Furthermore, certain diagnoses including oppositional defiant disorder, autism spectrum disorder, and attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder were directly referred as “challenging behaviors.”

Interviewer: So, some of the challenging behaviors that you have mentioned are spitting and aggressive behaviors including biting. Is there anything else?

Samantha: Autism...we finally at least have a clear diagnosis of a couple.

Interviewer: But do they all have challenging behaviors?

Samantha: Yeah, the autistic kids [all have challenging behaviors].

Medical reason is another reported factor associated with children’s challenging behaviors. Even though reported by fewer respondents, medical reason appears a shared attribution across participants. Some participants reported incidents where children’s behaviors dramatically improved once their vision and/or hearing were properly addressed. A few participants also stated their perceived connections between medication and challenging behaviors. Some believed that medications increase challenging behaviors, whereas others perceived the lack of medication as a reason for challenging behaviors.

Across cases, age was also found to be an attribution of children’s challenging behaviors, as there was a shared view that some behaviors are expected with young children. For example, when Tisha identified challenging behaviors in her classroom, she said, *“They might have normal early childhood behaviors, which is being emotional and hitting your friends or something.”* Several participants shared that younger children tend to have more challenging behaviors because they are still learning *“how to properly express themselves.”*



An additional finding that cut across all cases, even though not reported by every single participant, is that children engage in challenging behaviors to obtain social attention. The two examples presented below demonstrate how children use different topographies of challenging behaviors to achieve the same goal.

Interviewer: What are some behavioral patterns that you have seen?

Allison: Sometimes it's just a matter of I want to play with you, and I don't know how to get you to play with me. So I'm just going to push you over and hope that you'll come and play with me.

Susan while describing a child who talked about private parts in public said, *"It's not the fact that they are talking about privates. It's that they are drawing attention to themselves by saying in the middle of circle time, 'Ms. Susan, I'm sorry, I just looked at your chest.'"*

In summary, across cases, several child-related factors were identified to explain why children engage in challenging behaviors including neurological reasons, medical reasons, age, and attention seeking. One unique factor that was not found in all cases but stood out was gender. It was brought up by two individuals from two different childcare programs. One teacher said, *"They don't want to sit...especially with the boys, they want to play guns or they want to play soldier. They want to play police and we don't allow that."* In response to *"why do you think they engage in challenging behaviors,"* another teacher said, *"Well they are boys [emphasized]! I know that that is the crappiest excuse that somebody could ever give. But boys will be boys."*

**Case difference for theme 2 – attribution of challenging behavior.** In addition to across-case findings (i.e., family-related factors and child-related factors), a few unique perspectives were noted in one case. Allison, the educational director of the Bright Future Child Care, emphasized the roles that teachers and programs play in generating children's challenging

behaviors. The following interview excerpt reflects Allison's view that issues within the classroom environment set the stage for challenging behaviors.

Some of that [challenging behaviors] has to do with how productive they [teachers] are being in the classroom with the children, how engaged their classroom is with the activities. So, when we do have a situation such as biting, we will go in and do some observations. When was the last time that we switched toys out? If they are losing interest in your activity, please go ahead and move onto the next type of conversations. So we can typically curb those types of behaviors just with a quick observation.

Allison also shared her perspective that inconsistencies in the expectations of the school environment are often related to the occurrence of children's challenging behaviors.

Just having that lack of consistency and transitions from different teachers, different staff in the classroom, I think is a true correlation to behaviors. Not only are they [children] seeing it in their home life, they are seeing it in their early education environment, and I think those become triggers, that lack of consistency.

Lastly, Allison shared her view that teacher-child ratio and the length of each school day can also affect children's behaviors.

Interviewer: Do you have any other thoughts about the reasons for the challenging behaviors other than those two?

Allison: I think that the number of children in the classrooms has a lot to do with challenging behaviors, so the teacher to student ratio. The amount of hours that they spend here or in care [is also a related factor]. Because even though we have child-led activities and we have free choice and we offer all these opportunities, they're still in that same environment every day for

ten hours. Our center opens up at 6:45 in the morning until 6 o'clock in the afternoon. I don't have the actual statistics on it, but we do have children here from 6:45 until 6:00 PM, and that is a long day. I was talking to another agency yesterday, and I feel like we promote that. They are here because they can be here, so it's kind of a two-fold situation for me as a director here. Of course, we want them here, and in some situations and some living situations they are in a better environment here. But at the same time that nurturing responsive relationship with their parent or their guardian is lacking.

The reason for highlighting Allison's perspective was not because she was the only one who brought up school-related factors, but because her perspective is that family- and child-related factors are not the foremost reason for challenging behaviors. Instead, her responses emphasize the importance of all three groups of factors – family, child, and school in understanding the potential reason for the occurrence of challenging behaviors.

### **Summary for Research Question 1 – Perception of Challenging Behaviors**

In response to the first research question (i.e., How do early educators (i.e. administrators and teachers) describe their understanding of and feelings about the challenging behaviors of young children), two themes were identified. For the first theme, identification of challenging behaviors, similar findings were noted across cases. That is, even though childcare providers identified a wide range of children's behaviors as challenging, the primary reason for defining a behavior as challenging focused on two aspects - either the behavior affects the interests of the program, classroom, staff, and/or other children or the behavior was not understood by the teachers.

The second theme focused on to what do childcare providers attribute children's display of challenging behaviors. In discussion of the second theme, across-case attributions of challenging behaviors clustered as either family- or child-related factors. In addition, in highlighting an individual case difference the potential role of school-related factors in triggering challenging behaviors was noted by one administrator.

### **Practices for Addressing Challenging Behaviors and Promoting Social Emotional Development**

In this section, the results related to the second research question (i.e., How do early educators promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors) are presented. Two themes were identified through data analyses: (a) prevention of challenging behaviors, and (b) responses to challenging behaviors. Data supporting these two themes were primarily obtained from interviews and TPOT (Hemmeter et al., 2014) observations with support from documents and artifacts. With each theme, the shared findings across all cases are presented first followed by examples of uniqueness and/or differences noted.

#### **Theme #3: Prevention of Challenging Behavior**

This theme centers on the preventative strategies used in childcare settings to address children's challenging behaviors and promote children's social emotional development. Two focuses regarding prevention were noted - preventative strategies being used by childcare providers and perceived effectiveness of prevention.

**Preventative strategies.** Across all cases, childcare providers reported the use of three primary preventative strategies to address challenging behaviors. These strategies are: (a) classroom rules, schedules, and organizations, (b) building relationships, and (c) differentiations and modifications.

Establishing appropriate classroom rules and schedules and appropriately organizing the classroom environment as a means to prevent children's challenging behaviors was found through document analysis, interview, and observation. An example from document analysis can be seen in the following excerpts from "Discipline and Guidance Policy" document for the Lincoln Child Care Center:

Teachers at all times will show consistency in classroom rules, this will help children from becoming confused when teachers respond in different ways to the same behavior.

Following the Daily Schedule in each classroom will help children know what to expect.

This same sub-theme is illustrated in the following interview excerpt from Susan, *"My classroom has certain guidelines. The first one is, we are kind to everyone and everything. Every morning, they tell me that, Rule #1, be kind to everyone and everything. They know that."*

Caroline's description of her use of a set schedule provides another example, *"As long as I tell them what the next step is, usually they are okay and they have a set schedule, ... they don't excel very well when I do something different."* Finally, Ellie and Taylor shared in their interview on the importance of organizing classroom materials to avoid conflicts between children.

Sometimes, it takes having multiples of the same toy so that it doesn't become an issue of her having to take it out of their hand...I ended up going and getting four Daisys, four Minnies, four cats so everybody could have [one]. Then, they can all play happily.

Results from the TPOT (Hemmeter et al., 2014) observations also triangulated with the data obtained from the interviews and document analysis. The average score of Key Practice #1 – Schedules, Routines, and Activities is 49.68%, meaning that on average, teachers were scored "yes" on half of the indicators of Key Practice #1 (Table 9). Across the 14 key practices of TPOT, teachers' average score on this practice was one of the highest. Some of the indicators

that the majority of the teachers (>75%) received a “yes” score include: SR1-Teacher has a posted classroom schedule of daily activities; SR3-Teacher-directed activities are 20 minutes or shorter; SR4-Both large- and small-group activities occur during the observation; and SR7-A balance of child-directed and teacher-directed activities occur during the observation.

Across cases, building a positive and nurturing relationship with the children was also identified as a preventative strategy. In response to “*in your experiences, are there things that can be done to prevent challenging behaviors from happening,*” Tisha shared:

I feel like you just have to connect and build that relationship with the child. You never know what’s walking through the door, because, the first day [of school], they might not show you other sides of their behavior . . . once you get to know a kid, if you know that they might have moments knowing what triggers them is helpful, and the way you respond to them or give them space definitely makes a difference.

Besides Tisha, other childcare providers also reported the use of two strategies to build a relationship with the children - “kill them with kindness” and “know the child.” Caroline provides an example of this strategy in the following excerpt.

I try to kill them with kindness. I whisper sweet nothings in their ear. That is my first thing when I have a kid that is challenging. I will take them aside and tell them how smart he is and how sweet he is and what a great life he is going to have . . . I am lucky to be your friend. I am so glad you are in my classroom.

Samantha also shared her views of “know the child” as a means to prevent challenging behaviors.

First of all, they [the teachers] have to know the child. Know the child so that you don't set something up to trigger, especially with autism. Because there are trigger things, don't

hug them, this and that, certain triggers. So, being informed and educated on your individual children.

Childcare providers' intentions to build a relationship with children were also observed during the TPOT (Hemmeter et al., 2014) observations, even though only one program, in its written policy, suggests the use of this strategy as a way to address challenging behaviors. This finding is primarily supported by TPOT scorings on Key Practice #3 – Teachers Engage in Supportive Conversations with Children. This key practice was scored the highest with classrooms implementing on average 63.49% of the indicators (Table 9). Importantly, all classrooms received a score of “yes” on three indicators: SC1- Teacher acknowledges children’s communication; SC2-Teachers greet/call most children by name during the observation; SC3- Teacher has brief conversations with children. In addition, all but one classroom scored a “yes” on two other indicators: SC5- Teacher’s tone in conversations with children is generally positive, calm, and supportive; and SC6- Teacher responds to children’s comments and ideas by asking questions and making comments.

The final reported preventative strategy was differentiations and modifications. A variety of approaches were used under this category. For example, Chloe reported an incident where she allowed a child to engaged in classroom activities in a different way.

I had one child who couldn’t sit in group. One of the resource ladies suggested that I let him sit at the table with a crayon or a puzzle. So I did it and after group time. I basically went through everything we talked about in group, and the child knew everything. He heard it. But to physically sit in that small space next to them just drove that child nuts.

In another example, Anna reported doing small groups for children with aggressive behaviors as a means to prevent challenging behaviors from happening.

I try to do smaller groups to cut back on some of those hitting situations and group the kids up into two. We just started doing that and we noticed they are not as aggressive or fighting over things and doing more than one activity.

Finally, Tisha and Julia tried to modify their large group activities to meet the needs of individual children. Tisha shared, *“One of my kids probably just couldn’t sit that long [during circle time]. That’s a skill that has to be taught. At the beginning, it’s (group times) short, and then it gets longer as the year goes by.”* Besides shortening the length of large group activities, Julia also reported on the use of another differentiation strategy.

I just have them something to do with their hands because sometimes some kids just get so bored sitting at group time that they need something to do. That’s why, a lot of times, if I know this kid is going to be bored, I just wrap it up a little faster.

The above examples demonstrate that childcare providers viewed the use of differentiation and modification as a preventative strategy in which they engaged. However, data obtained from both the TPOT (Hemmeter et al., 2014) observations and the second round of teacher interviews point to a somewhat different perspective. Seven TPOT indicators of key practices rate the use of differentiations/individualizations. All classrooms received a score of “no” on 4 of the 7 indicators: (i.e., SR10- Children who need extra support are prepared for activities using an activity schedule or individualized cues at the beginning; SC10-Teacher uses alternative strategies when communicating with children who are nonverbal, language delayed, or dual-language learners; TSC8- teacher individualized instruction of social skills or emotional competencies based on children’s developmental needs; and TEE8-teacher individualizes instruction on emotions based on children’s developmental needs). Two classrooms received a score of “yes” on one indicator (i.e., PD7-teacher individualizes directions for children who need



more support). Four teachers scored “yes” on another two indicators (i.e., TR8-during transitions, the majority of children are actively engaged, including children who are waiting for the next activity; ENG9-Teacher modifies instruction or activity when children lose interest in large-group or small group activities).

In summary, across cases, three strategies were reported as used to prevent challenging behaviors including: (a) classroom rules, schedules, and organizations, (b) building relationships, and (c) differentiations and modifications. However, while the use of the first two strategies was supported across all three data sources (i.e., interviews, documents, and TPOT (Hemmeter, et al., 2014 observation) the final strategy of differentiation and modification was less fully in use when particularly viewed from the lenses of the TPOT. In addition, the TPOT tool was also able to verify that if a key practice was not noted as happening (e.g., Key Practice #7 – teaching behavioral expectations) then logically no modification or differentiation for individual children were made.

Two of the cases reported use of additional strategies that were not noted by the other case. The additional strategies included promoting teachers’ understanding of challenging behaviors (Bright Future Child Care and All for One Child Care) and teaching social emotional skills (Bright Future Child Care). For example, the following excerpt from Anna’s interview from All for One Child Care center describes the programs view of supporting teachers’ understanding as a means to prevent challenging behaviors.

I think even with the [children with] special needs, if we had more training and we were more comfortable and we understood more of their specific needs, then we could stop; we’re not going to stop all behavior, but we could stop some of it.

Allison, the director of the Bright Future Child Care, shared a similar view saying:

I think we have to be open to understanding the behavior, and that is on us. We have to be able to commit the time and to be able to be open to the knowledge, the research behind behavior and observation and some of those things that we can do for the kids, to figure it out. And you have to be willing to do that.

In addition to supporting teachers' understanding of challenging behaviors, Bright Future Child Care also reported placing emphasis on teaching social emotional skills. All childcare providers from this program reported the recognizing the importance of and implementing the teaching of social emotional skills. Allison, the director, stated that promoting social emotional development is at the core of the program's philosophy, which is also noted in the program handbook. Both Tisha and Julia reported the use of the Second Steps (Committee for Children, 2002) curriculum to teach children how to regulate their emotions. Trisha specifically noted, *"Our Second Step program has worked really well with that, helping kids out."* Actual implementation of social emotional skills instruction was also documented through the TPOT (Hemmeter et al. 2014) observations. In fact, the two classrooms from the Bright Future Child Care received higher scores for 11 of the 14 TPOT key practices as compared with classrooms from the other two cases. That is, higher scores were consistently obtained on all key practices related to teaching social emotional skills (i.e, Key Practice #7- Teaching Behavioral Expectations; Key Practice #8-Teaching social emotional skills and emotional competencies; Key Practice #9-Teaching friendship skills; Key Practice #10-Teaching children to express emotions & Key Practice #11-Teaching problem solving).

**Perceived effectiveness of prevention.** Findings indicative of childcare providers' perceptions of the effectiveness of prevention demonstrated clear case differences. Specifically, all individuals from the Bright Future Child Care showed a positive attitude towards the

effectiveness of preventative strategies whereas the other two cases presented a somewhat uncertain belief about the effectiveness. The following excerpts from the childcare providers at the Bright Future Child Care represent their responses to the interview question, “*Would you say the preventative strategies that you have used are generally effective?*”

Allison: I do think so, that’s why I can tell you that we haven’t had children expelled. I think that’s why I don’t have children sitting in my office. A lot of times I tell the teachers that’s [preventative strategies are] your second or third teacher in your room. You’re giving that ownership over to your children when they’re saying I could use some more help. That [the preventative strategies] is your help.”

Tisha: Yes! I feel like that’s the best. Because then you prevent it from escalating, because you want to keep them in the calm state or help them talk through it, and a lot of kids, I feel like I’m not just teaching. I feel like I’m helping them balance their emotions. I feel like it’s more effective to catch them before they go over.

Julia: I think so. I mean, it’s a long process thing, but I think we could prevent it.

In contrast, participants from the other two childcare programs expressed the view that sometimes prevention works, and sometimes it does not. For example, in response to “*do you think challenging behaviors can be prevented,*” Sarah said, “[Long pause] *I mean... Yes, but then no, because if we are working on it with them at school, that doesn’t necessarily mean that the parents will try and do the same thing at home.*” A similar perspective was shared by Elizabeth and Chloe, indicating that family-related factors held a strong impact as to whether preventative practices used at school would be effective.

Elizabeth: They don't always work. Because if you're looking at a kid that comes here and he is able to do what we need him to do to follow the class routine and things, if he goes home and everything is upheaved and not working at home, that's a massive confusion.

#### **Theme #4: Response to Challenging Behavior**

Across cases, three commonly used responses to challenging behaviors were identified by childcare providers: (a) "talking with the kiddo", (b) separation, and (c) involvement of family. In this section, I first explore these three strategies as they are presented across cases. This is followed by a discussion of differences or case-specific strategies.

**"Talking with the kiddo"**. Across cases, the most immediate response during and/or following a behavioral incident is "talking with the kiddo." Through conversations, childcare providers help children validate their feelings, actively think through their behaviors, confirm the rules, state the consequence, and redirect children to more appropriate alternative behaviors. The following excerpt from the interview with Ellie illustrates the components of how teachers "talk with the children".

Interviewer: How do you usually reason with them?

Ellie: What I tell her – and I mean Taylor does the same thing - what I say is, "I understand that you're upset, but I can't help you if you scream at me. Let's try and figure out what you want, or what happened." And then I'm like, "if you put your shoes on" – let's just say it's her shoes. "If you put your shoes on, you can help me with snack later. Or, you can pass out the cups."

Victoria also shared that she talked with her children immediately after challenging behaviors to restate the rules and redirect them.

Typically, [if the child is] running in the classroom, I will ask them to come to me or I will go to them. I always kneel down. I'll look in their face to make sure they're looking at me. Then I typically talk very directly and say, "we do not run in the classroom." It's a very [direct message] and then I'll say, "do you know why we don't run?"

In the following excerpt Sarah explains her response to a child who spits in people's faces.

I just tell her, "When you are going to Kindergarten, you won't be able to do this kind of stuff, so we have got to work on it now because if you are hurting your friends or you are spitting at them, then you get sent to the principal's office and your parents are called and your parents won't be happy when they have to leave work to come.

In addition, childcare providers also use "talking with kiddos" to redirect children and provide them alternative choices.

Caroline: If they snatch toys from somebody else, if they take something apart that some child has worked on, those are definitely things, or they're not working well together because they're saying, "I want this but over here," "No, I want this over here," and I'll say, "How about, can you go play with Harper over here right now and then it'll be your turn when this person's done?" Usually, that helps because I'll say, "When it's your turn, you can put the horses there," and then they'll say, "Oh, I can do it my way, I just have to go somewhere else for a little bit."

**Separation.** Across cases, all interviewees reported the use of "separation" as a response strategy following an incident of challenging behavior with some of them using it "probably 20

times a day.” Practices involving separation are usually marked by: (a) separating a child from the other children in the class; (b) permanently moving the child to another classroom; and (c) separating a child from on-going activities or toys. Even though suspension and expulsion can also be seen as separation, they are treated as different themes in this study and will be discussed later. The general procedure of separating a child from the other children was described by Anna.

Before we would use the strategy, we would give them a warning or ask the child to stop, but if that doesn’t work then we would tell them that they need to go to time-out or they need to go to the calming area. Most of them are pretty good about going on their own, because they know it’s going to be five minutes or less. If they don’t then we’ll take their hand or pick them up if they throw themselves down. We sit them out for five minutes and then we come over, “Okay, do you know what you’re over here for?” Usually they’ll tell you, “Oh, I was hitting my friend,” whatever it was. Then [we ask], “Okay, so what do we do instead of hitting?” “Oh, I can tell them that I’m mad because they took my toy.” We will think of a strategy and then we’ll let them come back.

Findings from other data sources supported this description of the use of separation. That is, separation of a child from the other children usually starts with an incident of challenging behavior, following which there may or may not be redirections and “talking”. Next, the child is either invited or taken to a different space in the classroom. In the majority of the situations, teachers would follow the rule of “one minute for each year of their age.” However, if the child is “not ready” or “does not want to rejoin the group,” the separation can last longer. Following the separation, teachers usually ask the child to recall what happened that led to this consequence. Some teachers take the opportunity to teach alternative ways of behaving, while others do not. Ultimately, if teachers think the child is ready, he/she is invited to rejoin the group.

When asked what types of behaviors warranted the use of separation, the participants named a variety of behaviors. For example, Victoria reported that she would separate a child from the rest of the group for “not following directions.” She said, “*It could be anything from a transition time from doing centers to going outside.*” In addition, she reported using this strategy with either self-injury or physical aggression.

With the Peace Table, the next thing I will say is, “How about you sit on the wall because I am so afraid you’re going to hurt yourself or hurt someone else.” That’s a little bit, I feel, a true I need to separate you because you could hurt my other friends in the class. Furthermore, childcare providers also use this strategy with behaviors that are distracting and/or disruptive.

Anna:            If a child is distracting others from learning or being aggressive, that would be the most common [reason] I think for this. I think with the crying, if it’s where it’s distracting, [we would use separation].

In response to “*why do you use this strategy* [separation],” Susan shared:

If I separate them completely from the group, still in earshot, still able to hear what I’m saying and still able to participate if they know an answer. Why? [Short Pause] Because I don’t like the whole circle, the whole table or a whole class disrupted. I really don’t.

Across cases, it is clear that in the majority of situations, childcare providers separate a child from the other children either to protect other children from being harmed or to prevent the class from being distracted or disrupted. However, their perceived effectiveness of this strategy on the challenging behavior itself remains mixed. Two individuals identified “separating a child from the other children” the “most effective” strategy because “*I truly believe no one likes being*

*separated.*” One teacher reported that this strategy only works “7% of the time,” because “*she still does it [kicking and hitting] to the teachers and her classmates as well.*”

Another less commonly reported procedure was permanently moving a child to another classroom as a means of separation. That is, as stated by Victoria, “*Child A is having a problem in this class. Let’s see if we can move Child A into this other class.*” The reported use of this strategy was to address physical aggression, non-compliance, and elopement. Similar to the first separation strategy, this strategy is considered when the challenging behavior puts someone in harm’s way or disrupts the functioning of the classroom.

The final reported separation strategy is separating a child from on-going activities or toys. For example, as stated by Susan, “*If we have another person pushing, we will put this activity up and we will not do it,*” or “*If you guys cannot share, no one is going to be able to play with the doll house.*” In other words, this strategy usually starts with an incident of challenging behavior, following which redirections may or may not be given. If the challenging behavior continues, the child is removed from either the activity or the toy. Even though removing a child from an activity could mean separating this child from the rest of the group, the above example indicates that sometimes all children are separated from an activity because of challenging behaviors demonstrated by one or a few children.

In summary, across cases three separations strategies were reported to be frequently utilized following an incident of challenging behaviors. However, one finding is important to highlight. That is separation may at times be presented as a demand and other times as a choice. Ellie’s response illustrates separation presented as a demand, as she says,



If it's during circle time, and somebody is screaming or kicking, they need to be removed from circle time. Stuff like that. I mean, that's just one example. When they're being – mainly for aggression. We say, “You need to take a break.”

Tisha, on the other hand described that in her classroom separation is a choice.

Sometimes we have movie day and we'll vote on the movie, so I guess if you're having a strong feeling, you can go sit in the library if you don't want to sit here and watch the movie. I don't really [ask them to leave]—that was a choice, you know? I gave them a choice, so I didn't really send them there, but they will leave if they're like, “Oh, this is boring” or whatever the words they might have chosen for the movie. It's like, “Hey, it's okay for you to feel that way.” So, I give them a choice.

Even though there seems to be two distinct ways of using separation, the boundary between separation as a choice and separation as a demand is not often clear. For example, Victoria shared that her classroom has a “peace table” where children can choose to go and calm down.

In my classroom we have a Peace Table. If anyone is acting out or sometimes they're just sad or sometimes they're tired. It's not a punishment. It's just mainly if you need to go someplace for quiet, there is only one chair at the table. There is a giant teddy bear on it, and the Feelings Chart is right by. That's where they can go.

Here Victoria presented the “peace table” as a separation choice when children need it. However, as she further described the use of the “peace table,” it was apparent that she often directs children to the peace table instead of offering it as a choice. She said, “*Often times it is redirection. 'How you're acting right now shows me that you do not have peace. You are not acting peaceful in the classroom. You need to sit at the Peace Table.'*”

The boundary between separation as a choice and separation as a demand appears vague partially due to the design of the separation space. According to the narratives and classroom observations, all classrooms have a designated space (e.g., “calm corner,” “peace table,” etc.) for the use of the separation strategy. The space was typically equipped with sensory toys, puzzles, books, and other play materials. With such an arrangement, it is hard to decide whether the separation strategies remove a child from a situation, introduce a child to another situation, or both. Regardless, separation was the most commonly reported strategy used following an incident of challenging behavior.

**Involvement of family.** In response to a challenging behavior, another reported strategy across all cases was the involvement of family. The analysis of the interviews, documents, and observations documented that all three cases were highly consistent in using this strategy to address the goals of informing parents of the situation and asking parents to be consistent with what programs are doing or what programs expect them to do. Across all cases, there was clear documentation that childcare providers are required to inform parents of behavioral incidents and if another child is involved informing parents must also occur for the affected child.

Interviewer: How do you record and document incidents of challenging behaviors?

Victoria: If it is an interaction that hurts another student, as an example, if someone is running through the class repeatedly and then they bump heads with another student, we have things that are called “Ouchy Reports.” Those reports are filled out, and then we ask the student that was hurt, their parent to sign it. Saying that we did talk to them, that your child bumped heads with a fellow student that was running.

In contrast, reports are less consistent when it comes to informing parents of children who exhibit challenging behaviors. For example, even though the administrators of the Lincoln Child Care Center shared that all parents are given a report at the end of day including “*notifying the parent of the child who bit,*” teachers reported that they do not share every behavioral incident with families. Victoria stated that “Ouchy Reports” are only filled out for parents of the affected child. Caroline shared that she does not tell parents about every “bad” behavioral incident to “*give them a break.*” In addition, Sarah mentioned that she only writes daily communication sheet for some families.

Not for every kid because I realize some parents don’t even read it and they don’t really care for it. They just toss it in the trash. I just do it for some of the kids. The parents that I do know who actually read it and they care about their day and their routine and what they are learning and how their day is.

These examples revealed that even though informing parents of challenging behavior is a shared response strategy across cases, it does not guarantee that every family would be informed following every incident of every challenging behavior. However, parents are more likely to be involved or informed when a program expects them to be consistent with what the school is doing or what the school expects them to do. This finding emerged from multiple data sources including the interviews and program policies. For instance, Sarah recalled a behavioral meeting with the parents of a child who demonstrated “constant” aggressive behaviors.

Interviewer: What did you guys talk about during that conference?

Sarah: With me... I think Samantha [the director] started it off first and then, I stressed that it can’t just be the teacher trying to help, it has to be at home, too. I expressed that she [the child] has potential. I didn’t talk about all the

negative things that she has done. I said she has potential to change before she goes to Kindergarten because it starts now and not try to do it when she goes to Kindergarten. She still has a while to change that. Then I said, “I want you to be more involved in her situations and her aggressive behavior and stuff like that.” Then, our family service lady stepped in and she gave her [the mom] some techniques.

Similarly, Elizabeth emphasized the importance of family involvement when describing an incident where parents said they did not experience any challenging behaviors at home.

Interviewer: In the situation where you said, “This has been happening a lot at school,” and the parents responded, “We have never seen it at home.” What would you do next?

Elizabeth: Well this [the challenging behavior] is happening here, so we need to figure out what we are going to do. You might do some great talks at home about responsibility at school and not hurting your friends, depending on their age. But we need their [parents’] help and they need to be talking with them [the children] about what goes on.

These views shared by childcare providers were also reflected in the program’s discipline policies. For example, “*Encourage parents to have consistency between the behavior guidance at the center and home.*” Importantly, as a follow-up, I asked the participants whether this discipline guideline is bidirectional. That is, “*If the parents have a policy at home, would you say that you would try to replicate that policy and then bring that into your classroom?*” One participant responded, “*Opposite. I like them to do the policy that is written by the administrators and also the Health Department Guidelines.*”

In addition, some participants expressed a positive attitude towards parents who were willing to “help.” For example, Allison shared,

I think we followed up really well with the parents to make sure that they were on the same page and that they too were doing the same thing, so we had consistency between home and school. They were wonderful! They absolutely were on board with that.

Tisha also showed her appreciation of parents who were willing to help.

I feel like this group of parents, they’re really supportive. They want to know how their children behaved. I feel like there is no parents in denial of their children’s behavior here. They know their child. They try and support me with working on things at home, like that emotional little girl I told you about last time, they try and work on her talking her emotions out without her having a meltdown. But it could [also] be other things like, “Hey,” you know, “your kid’s having a hard time keeping his hands to himself. This is what we’re doing at school. Do you think you could help at home?” These parents, I see them every day. They’re pretty open to try things I need them to try with their child. I feel like this group of parents are really great and help me out a lot.

Informing parents of the situation and asking parents to be consistent with the school are two shared purposes for involving families following incidents of challenging behaviors across cases. In addition, two of the three cases also involved families in efforts to develop a behavioral plan, even though the degree of involvement is unclear. During the administrator interviews and the first round of teacher interviews, participants from two cases, the Bright Future Child Care and the All for One Center, shared that sometimes parents are informed of or involved in developing a behavioral plan. Allison described how their program obtained information from the foster parents of a child with challenging behaviors to create a behavioral plan.

Allison: We communicated with the foster parents, first and foremost, to get a better understanding of what he was experiencing... It was us [communicating] with the parents directly ... The parents were very honest. They were very willing to help.

Interviewer: And after you got some information from the family, you then developed an intervention plan for him.

Allison: Yes. Yes. We used visual schedules. We were able to put a calendar in place, so he knew when his visits were going to be.

The development of individual plans for children with challenging behaviors with the help of the child's family were also reported by the All for One center. During the interviews the participants were asked, "*How do you involve parents in developing a behavioral plan for their child?*" One teacher from this center shared, "*We do have some parents -- if something does go on that book [intervention plan book], that they want to have the copy and they can comment.*"

These examples illustrate that even though two of the three cases noted that they involved families in developing a behavioral plan, the roles of parents are either perceived as an information resource or passive recipient of information from the program. This finding is further supported by the TPOT tool (Hemmeter et al., 2014). TPOT has two key practices related to family involvement (i.e., Key Practice #13-Connecting with families, and Key Practice #14-Supporting Family Use of the Pyramid Model). Scores on the indicators from these two practices support the above finding from the interviews (Table 9). That is, all classrooms were scored as "no" on all Key Practice #14 indicators and also "no" on an indicator about "bidirectional communication" of Key Practice #13. Particularly, when teachers were asked about the role that

parents play in supporting their children's social emotional development or addressing children's challenging behavior at school, the most common response was, "*They don't really have one.*"

**Case differences for theme 4 – response to challenging behaviors.** Three case differences in terms of responses to occurrences of challenging behaviors were noted. First, taking formal data on challenging behaviors, especially the "repetitive" and "constant" ones, was reported by the Bright Future Child Care and the All for One center. The All for One center had a family service provider who was responsible for conducting observations of children experiencing difficulties, taking data on repetitive challenging behaviors, sharing strategies and resources with the teachers, and communicating with and offering suggestions to the families. Her helpfulness was brought up multiples times during the interviews by all of the program participants. For example, she put ABC (antecedent-behavior-consequence) sheets in every classroom to help the teachers document behavioral patterns. She also uses the ABC sheet to collect behavioral data for the teachers and communicate the results with the teachers and families. The Bright Future Child Care center also used a similar document for recording data on challenging behaviors. Their form asks questions for more details and provides multiples choices under each category (e.g., activity, others individuals involved). All participants from Bright Future Child Care center indicated that they were aware of this document and had used it at some point during their teaching in the program.

Allison:        So, we use behavior incident reports. On [challengingBehavior.org](http://challengingBehavior.org), I have access to the website where our assistant director will enter the incidents as the teacher complete them for a child, and we generate graphs. That way we can get a better understanding of what time of day are these

behaviors happening? Is it the same behavior? Is the aggression towards the same teacher, the same peer, that kind of information to help us plan.

Interviewer: [In terms of] the behavior incident report, are all teachers required to fill it out for every incident of challenging behavior?

Allison: No, so [only] if they see a pattern, if it's a behavior that they are not able to redirect and they are seeing repetition of that behavior. Typically, we stay between three – on the aggressive behaviors, between three and five. We want to start taking a look at that. Let's not wait until you get 20 behavior incident reports to try to figure out what's going on.

The second case difference found just for the Bright Future Child Care center was the use of differential reinforcement in response to challenging behaviors. The employment handbook has a section dedicated to “encouraging positive behavior.” It states,

Be consistent with discipline and reinforcement of a child...When disciplining a child, try to use the consequence most related to the event and most meaningful to the child...Other procedures might include reinforcement of desirable aspects of the behavior, reinforcing appropriate responses...

In alignment with the program policy, Julia described her use of this strategy in her classroom.

If say someone's running around or not playing, I'll say, “Okay, all right, guys, you know what? Good job, Bobby, Tom, and Jerry. Let's go ahead, and let's just read our story.”

Sometimes the other kid [who is running around or not playing] will be like, “Oh, wait a minute. Ms. Julia is reading a story,” because they all like stories, and he'll come over, and I'll go, “Oh, good job. Are you going to sit down and join us?” He's like, “Yeah.”

I'm like, “Good job. Thank you.”



The third and final case difference was particularly unique, because it was only reported once during one interview. However, due to its saliency and intensity, it was seen as important to report. The strategy is the involvement of the police department following an incident of challenging behaviors. The related incident is narrated below.

Elizabeth: I had a question. I've noticed the school district uses the police department a lot now. Which I've used it one time, but it was unheard of that I would even think of calling the police in these situations.

Interviewer: What was the situation when you had to call the police department?

Elizabeth: Very- very- trashing my office. Throwing equipment.

Chloe: That's where he was throwing equipment, computers.

Elizabeth: I couldn't do anything. I had to stand there, and I couldn't... but that's really challenging.

Chloe: The child was up at the windowsill.

Elizabeth: Yeah. Running from me, trashing it and things are out of control.

Chloe: Trying to get out of the building. He was trying to get out of the building.

Interviewer: What did the police department do?

Elizabeth: I've never dealt with that. But that one time I thought, well I heard that the school district calls [police department] for out-of-control behavior. So I did call them. I don't think it did anything. I called the parents as well. He [police officer] came in and basically was trying to keep the respect of the child, so he basically didn't say anything other than, "How's your day going?" and, "I go to the school sometimes and work with kiddos." It went in one ear and out the other.

Chloe: Didn't he tell you- Didn't we talk with him and say we expected more from that and he said the police try to keep - when they [children] are young like that they want them to think of them as friends. As somebody they can go to.

Elizabeth: Which I understand.

Chloe: Yes, but in the situation, the child was trying to get out of the building. He was destroying, I mean this child was not acting like a four-year-old. This child probably acting more like a teenager in his destructive behavior and there was nothing we could do. The parents didn't even come.

Elizabeth: Well no, the dad did come.

Chloe: Eventually.

Elizabeth: But he basically said, "Okay, buddy, let's leave."

Chloe: Yeah. In my mind, when I'm to that level I am basically wanting documentation. Because I foresee this child is going to continue to have a history of violent behavior. I foresee that this child's home environment that the police may already be aware of. So I'm trying basically to get documentation on a legal level for whatever the future of this family is.

Similar to all the other challenging situations, this incident started with a behavior that was perceived harmful and "destructive" to a point where the administrators felt there was nothing they could do to defuse the situation. However, after all the solutions were exhausted, the response detoured because one administrator, with her experience that "*public schools are doing it,*" called the police with the hope that they could help. The other administrator approved because she believed the behavior was severe enough that it needed to be legally documented.

## **Summary for Research Question 2 – Practices for Addressing Challenging Behaviors**

The thematic findings presented focused on how early educators address challenging behaviors and promote children's social emotional development. The two themes that emerged were prevention of challenging behaviors and response to challenging behaviors. The first theme included two topics (i.e., preventative strategies & perceived effectiveness of prevention strategies). The three commonly used prevention strategies reported were (a) classroom rules, schedules, and organizations, (b) building relationships, and (c) differentiations and modifications. Though participants from one case reported a positive attitude towards the use of behavioral prevention, participants from the other two cases were uncertain about the effectiveness of behavioral prevention. The second theme, response to challenging behaviors, included the three topics of "talking with the kiddo," separation, and involvement of family. In addition, two case differences were taking data on challenging behaviors and reinforcing alternative, appropriate behaviors.

### **Exclusionary Discipline Practices**

The results in this section respond to the third research question (i.e., In what situations are expulsion and suspension reported as used or considered for use?). Three exclusionary discipline practices are examined (i.e., in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, & expulsion). All three practices share some similar features with the separation strategies discussed in Theme #4 (i.e., response to challenging behaviors). Yet, each exclusionary discipline practice also has some distinct features that are worth noting. Hence, each of the discipline practices are treated as an individual theme.

### **Theme #5: In-School Suspension**

The use of in-school suspension (ISS) reported across cases significantly outnumbered

the use of the other two exclusionary discipline practices. All individuals reported having used ISS during the past year. One teacher shared that she uses ISS “two to four times every week.” Similar to the separation strategies, ISS is also used with a variety of children’s challenging behaviors including physical aggression, disruption (e.g., screaming), elopement, not following directions, spitting, and verbal aggression. Across cases, ISS was reported as used or considered for use when the situation is “out of control.” Tisha described an incident where she had to send a child out following aggressive behaviors.

The teacher prior to me left. I just kind of came and took over, I didn’t really know those children, I didn’t have relationships with them that their behavior was already allowed for so long that they didn’t listen to me too well. He was being violent toward kids and me. He was running around on the playground, chasing another kid with a block. It was a threat putting him in the classroom with me and the children. I am trained on Mandt [restrain techniques used when the behavior of an individual poses a threat of harm to themselves and/or others], but they don’t do Mandt and restraint here in this program. That day that kid was out of control, so I called the office, and I said, “What do you guys want to do? He’s running around the classroom, and he’s doing this, this, and that.”

From her perspective, the situation was challenging due to the harmfulness of the behavior, the lack of relationship between the teacher and the children, as well as not being able to use strategies that she is familiar with, which resulted in sending the child to the director’s office.

Perceptions by the adult(s) of the level of risk for physical harm directly impacts the use of ISS. That is, if a child or adult was physically harmed or could potentially be physically harmed by a child exhibiting challenging behaviors, the child would be removed for ISS

immediately without the consideration of alternative consequences (e.g., time-out). For instance, Caroline described in what situations she would consider the use of ISS.

When those challenging children would really start to hurt people or if they made somebody bleed, if they made somebody fall down with a crack on the head, like you could hear the head hit the ground... That is it, "Shoot. You are out of my room. You may not be in this room. You may go to the director and sit in the office for a little bit."

In addition to the perceived severity of challenging behaviors, situation can also be "out of control" depending on the time of the day. Victoria shared,

Often times it is stuff that I feel like I don't have much control on, like naptime. Twice a week I will send someone during naptime because if they won't lie down, I don't know how you get them to. That's the kind of situation [that I would send them to the office].

Moreover, some incidents can become "out of control" when teachers run out of strategies to address the challenging behavior. These situations are generally marked by the use of other reactive strategies prior to an ISS. One representative example was described by Ellie and Taylor. After they shared their use of separation with children who scream for an extended period of time, I asked, "*What happens if they sit there for five minutes (the typical length of time that they would send a child for time-out) and they're still screaming?*"

Ellie: Then, it becomes the safety factor.

Taylor: If it lasts longer then we try to remove them from the room.

**Case differences for theme 5 - ISS.** Though ISS is frequently used or considered for use when things are considered to be "out of control," there are a few distinct case differences that emerged. First, participants from All for One Center noted that ISS was used when behavioral incidents occurred in their work with children with autism. Sarah and Anna's classroom includes

two children diagnosed with autism and another child who has been referred for evaluation.

Sarah and Anna use ISS as the primary strategy to address challenging behaviors exhibited by these three children. In the All for One center, there is a designated space located outside of the classrooms, called the “magic room.” This room is equipped with stuffed animals, low lighting, and lots of soft materials. According to the teachers, all of the children like it, “*It is new. It is exciting. They are all curious about it.*” Though this room is not frequently used with other children, it is the “go-to-place” when the three children with autism exhibit challenging behaviors.

Interviewer: What kind of behaviors would you use the magic room with?

Anna: For the most part, right now, since we’re still being trained on how to use it, we usually just use that with our autistic children.

Sarah came to the realization that she only uses ISS with children with autism during our interview. This example also revealed that reactive strategies can be quite different depending on whether the child exhibiting challenging behaviors has a diagnosis of autism.

Interviewer: Have you used Strategy Two [ISS]?

Sarah: I used it with Child 1 and Child 2. I have taken them out of the room and had them in the magic room.

Interviewer: Are those the two kids with autism?

Sarah: Yes.

Interviewer: What does that look like? What did they do that you had to take them to the magic room?

Sarah: If Child 1 was constantly hitting the kids, it doesn’t matter where I put her at, I would just take her out and put her in the magic room where she

could draw or roll all over the pillows if she wanted to. It has all kinds of things in there for them to do or let her grab a stuffed animal out of there and bring it in the classroom for a little bit. With Child 2, if he is head banging on everything, then I will bring him out too, and walk him around or have him in the magic room where he likes to look at himself in the mirror and just bangs his head on the pillows which is softer than the floor or a chair or a table or the door and that seems to let him get his aggression out, but on something soft and not in front of the kids and give him his own personal space.

Interviewer: It sounds like Strategy Two is often used with kids with autism versus Strategy One [time-out]...

Sarah I guess I don't use with that [time-out] with the autistic kids, because they don't really understand that. I guess I don't really use the magic room with the kids who don't have autism!

Interviewer: You don't use it at all?

Sarah: Uh-uh.

Interviewer: Did you just realize that?

Sarah: Yes! [laughs] I just realized I don't use that. Huh!

This example points to a potential reason for the differential treatments for children with autism. That is, typical separation strategies do not seem to work with them and in this situation, ISS appears to be a safer decision to protect these children from self-injury.

The second case difference noted was the type and level of involvement of administrators in making the decision to use ISS as well as their attitudes towards ISS. The three cases

demonstrated distinct differences. In All for One center, ISS has not occurred in the form of sending a child to the director's office. It is usually implemented by taking the children with autism to the magic room or taking other children exhibiting challenging behaviors but without a diagnosis of autism out for a walk. Occasionally, a teacher from another classroom might offer to take a child exhibiting challenging behaviors to her/his room as a means to assist or support the teacher addressing the behavioral incident.

In the Bright Future Child Care center, the main form of ISS is sending a child to the director or the office. However, ISS is usually initiated by the teachers and occurs at a much lower frequency (i.e., only once or twice in each classroom in the past year). Julia shared that in this program, "*If we can handle it, they [the administrators] would rather let us handle it, [instead of sending children to their office].*" The interview with Allison, the director, also revealed that ISS is not promoted in the Bright Future Child Care center.

Allison: Very rarely I have had a child down in my office. So, I understand what that does, but I feel like it creates an escape tactic, so that behavior worked for them. So, "now all I have to do is that same behavior or something similar and I'll get out of doing the activity that I was expected to do." So we keep them in the classroom.

Interviewer: What if a teacher has to call you or somebody else and says, "Hey, can you take him with you?"

Allison: I've had it happen, not often, but yes, I have had a teacher call down for help in a classroom. We go down, but we don't slip into her role. We manage the rest of the children while she manages the child and helps the child because we don't want to create that break in their relationship.



However, what we've found was that that was part of the problem. There was a teacher/child personality conflict. After about two weeks, we decided that classroom probably wasn't the best fit developmentally for the teacher based on her background and her desires. We were able to make a shift in our Center, and she went to a younger classroom where she has been very successful in there.

In handling the situation of a teacher calling for help, instead of removing the child or working directly with the child, the administrator chose to assist the teacher while still maintaining her role in the classroom allowing for relationship building with the child and managing the behaviors.

The Lincoln Child Care center yet uses another approach. In this center, ISS is implemented by removing a child from his/her classroom to the director's office. ISS, however, is used at a much higher frequency with one of the teachers reporting that she uses this strategy "two to four times every week." Not only do the teachers rely on the administrators to handle difficult situations by using ISS, but also reported that administrators initiated ISS. For example, Victoria shared the administrators' role in handling a child exhibiting physical aggressions.

Victoria: They [the children] have gone to the office. They [the office] are typically good about keeping them there for an extended period of time.

Interviewer: How long does it usually take them to calm down?

Victoria: Tens of minutes. The directors as they come back to the class saying, "Now Child A, why were you in the office?" "I was climbing on kids." "Are we going to do that?" They're like, "no!" "Because you want to be in Ms. Victoria's class, right?" She says it in front of everyone. Yes, very

much so, like at the door of my classroom, so then I'm like, "Thank you so much Ms. Elizabeth [the director], because I was so worried about the safety of my friends." Then, typically, the student that was just in Ms. Elizabeth's [office] is like, "Okay. I'm ready to be back in here."

Susan shared that she did not like sending children out, but sometimes if the administrators see children exhibiting challenging behaviors, they would take children out.

I very rarely... honestly, I don't like to send a student out of the room. I really don't.

There is a window between my room and the office and one of my four boys happens to sleep right there in front of that window. She [the director] saw him screwing around, she came in and snatched him right up. When she walked in one of the other four boys flew down on to his mat, so she knew he was up to no good. She pulled him out too. I don't send them out.

Additionally, all three teachers from the Lincoln Child Care Center reported using the administrators as a "scare factor." For example, Susan would use it to her advantage sometimes.

I will tell them, "That wasn't very smart. You just ran in front of the office window and hit another student. I dare you to walk over and see if Elizabeth is in the window."

"Huh...[children said]" "What do you think you should do?" "I think I'm going to lay down." "I think that's a really good idea." I will use that to my advantage sometimes.

In summary, the cases shared many commonalities, yet also demonstrated distinct differences in their use of ISS. Findings across cases indicated that ISS is often used when the adults perceive the situation to be "out of control." Findings analyzed by each case revealed that two factors played an important role in the differences noted between cases including the student population served and the administrators' roles in the decision-making process.

## Theme #6: Out-Of-School Suspension

Across cases, out-of-school suspension (OSS) was used less frequently than ISS. Specially, OSS was reported by some as used only once or twice in the past 12 months with the others reporting not having used OSS. When used, across cases OSS was reported to be applied to address behaviors that are either of a high level of severity or with a prolonged history. More detail on these two reasons for use are provided below as well as a brief presentation of case differences relevant to this theme.

First, across cases, childcare providers reported the use and/or the consideration to use OSS with behaviors of high severity, particularly those that put individuals in “dangerous” situations. For example, Anna described an incident of using OSS because she was bleeding and she was by herself in the classroom.

Anna: I’ve only used OSS once. That was when a child caused harm to myself and that I had to have the director make that call, but she had punched my mouth several times where I had blood coming from my mouth. She had choked me. So, I’ve only used that once. We probably would not have used OSS at all, but since I was alone and I had to have something.

Victoria said she had never heard that OSS or expulsion had been used at the Lincoln Child Care center. As a followed up I asked, “*In what situation would you consider saying to your the directors, I may need this kid to leave for a few hours or days, or we may want this kid to be removed?*”

Victoria: I would say if they’re hurting other children or themselves, actually. I have had students who hurt themselves. We had one child that would hold her breath, and she would start turning colors and stuff. She was sent to the

office, and I believe her mom was called. She was somewhat causing harm to herself. That same child would often times bite herself and do stuff like that. I always sent her to the office for that specific situation.

Interviewer: So, was she was sent home because she was kind of hurting herself.

Victoria: She wasn't sent home. I believe they called her mom.

Interviewer: Did mom have to come in and do something?

Victoria: Mm-hmm. She was like, "Oh, she does that all the time." She was like, "Well, I'm here to pick up anyways so I'll just pick her up."

Thus, even though it was an unsuccessful use of OSS, there was an intention to send the child home because she was causing harm to herself. Other teachers that had used OSS, while infrequently, noted that OSS was primarily used to address "harmful" behaviors that impacted *"the safety of the other children"* (i.e., Elizabeth and Chloe). This was echoed by Samantha stating that, *"We can handle pretty much anything, we can plug our ears, we can handle parent change. We can't take physical aggression to other kids."*

A second possible reason for considering the use of OSS to address behaviors of a high severity, identified by Taylor and Ellie, was to hopefully use the home environment to cause a change of the behavior.

Interviewer: Why do you think having them home for a few hours or day may help?

Taylor: Maybe they're tired, maybe they just didn't want to be at school that day.

Maybe they're just upset. Maybe they –

Ellie: They just need that time to –

Taylor: They need the time to stay with mom, or they need time to stay in their bed. Or maybe they just want to go home and cuddle with a toy or, whatever helps them at home. Maybe they'll forget the situation.

Ellie: That and for the safety of the other kids as well.

The second pattern noted across cases is that OSS is used with behaviors that are repetitive and/or behavior that have a prolonged history. Some of the identified behaviors are at the high end of causing harm, while others are not. In the following excerpt Ellie and Taylor shared an intent to send a child home.

Interviewer: Have you used any of these strategies [exclusionary discipline]?

Taylor: We did call mom and let her know that she might have to come and get him because of what he was doing.

Interviewer: What did he do?

Taylor: He was cursing repeatedly, repetitively.

Ellie: It was the only thing that was coming out of his mouth, and it was every 30 seconds.

Taylor: It was during lunch, so everybody was at the table. I had to call mom and let her know, "He is saying this, we can't have that here." We tried to offer him other words to say and he will say that word, and then he'll go right back to saying the other one, and we can't have him doing that. Mom was like, "Well, just let me know if I need to come and get him." I said, "Okay." He ended up not having to go home that day because after nap, he decided that he didn't –

Ellie: Want to say it anymore.

The following excerpt provides another example shared by Victoria about her thoughts on which situations would lead to a decision of OSS.

Interviewer: So for you to use OSS and expulsion it has to be something that they are really hurting themselves or others?

Victoria: And consistently doing [it]. So in my opinion, if I'm once or twice a week having to send them to the office and then the behavior tends to be corrected once they're returned to the classroom, that would not be out-of-school suspension and expulsion. In my own opinion, those would truly be if time-out or in-school-suspension is not working at this time. Then once they're sent to the office, if they come back into the classroom and they're still climbing on kids and still pushing their faces into the flooring, then, in my opinion, the only other thing would be to call mom or dad and get them involved because where are you going to put them?

Even though these two examples represented behaviors with different intensities in terms of their harmfulness, the important point to note here is that for both examples OSS was not considered until other discipline strategies had been tried.

**Case differences** for theme six- out of school suspension. A unique usage of OSS was identified by the participants from the All for One center as they expressed the view that families are another factor that contribute to the decision to consider OSS as a viable option. Sarah, for example, stated that she sent a child home as a way of motivating the parents to take the issue more seriously and thus address the child's behaviors at home.

I expect her parents to have a wakeup call like, "Okay, this is really serious. This is the first time she actually got sent home from school." And it is just daycare, so just imagine

if she is going to public school. I thought maybe that would be a wake-up call to her parents and they would be like, “Okay, we really need to be on board and do something about her behavior.” That is what I was kind of hoping.

Other teachers from the All for One center also shared a similar perspectives. Though all three programs do not have policies guiding the use of ISS or OSS, Ellie brought up that their program was revising the discipline policy and she specifically emphasized the need to have very specific policies and procedures on OSS and expulsion use.

That's what I had pointed out that we need to figure out: if they [the parents] refuse a referral, do we do three [OSS]? Or [if] the situation doesn't get worse, [do we do] expulsion: they have to be disenrolled just because of the safety of [other children].”

Lastly, one OSS incident reported by Ellie and Taylor from the All in One center does not fit in any of the patterns (both commonalities and case differences) discussed above. The decision of OSS was resulted from a child refusing to put her clothes on. Ellie and Taylor shared that they had to call mom because “*sanitary wise that is not okay for a lot of reasons*” and “*I do not want anybody seeing her indecent like that. I'm very uncomfortable with that, besides the cleanliness issues.*”

In summary, OSS decisions are often made when a behavior is harmful with a great intensity and when a behavior is repetitive and unresolvable by other strategies. However, some case differences do exist revealing that OSS is also used to address families of children with challenging behaviors and in some rare situations, to resolve an uncomfortable situation encountered by the childcare providers.

### **Theme #7: Expulsion**

Across the three cases, expulsion was the least frequently used exclusionary discipline

practice according to the participants. Some recalled only one or two incidents with others not having experiences with expulsion at all. Given this low level of use, the focus turned to having the participants for each case consider under what conditions they used or would potentially use expulsion. Participants across all three cases came to a consensus on the practice of expulsion with compelling or unique conditions or contexts in which to use expulsion. In the following paragraphs, the three shared sub-themes are presented: (a) expulsion to address families, (b) expulsion to address extreme behaviors (“zero tolerance”), and (c) discrepancies between policies and practices.

**Addressing families.** Across cases, the primary reason that expulsion was used or considered for use was to address families. Chloe said, *“I would say the kids that we’ve actually disenrolled have all been because of the parents’ lack of support.”* Parents’ lack of support in the participants views included parents who are “in denial,” parents who “do not help,” and parents who “cause really major issues.” Importantly, these manifestations of “parents’ lack of support” are not exclusive or sole causes. In fact in the eyes of the participants the concerns typically occurred together in part or whole and/or concurrently or sequentially. Following their reporting that parents’ lack of support was the main reason of expulsion, Chloe and Elizabeth further recalled the factors affecting the decision making process for three expulsion incidents.

Chloe:           The three to come to my mind, that’s what it was. It was the parent’s lack of support. Parents.

Elizabeth:       Back to the same thing, stuff going on at home.

Chloe:           The parents aren’t helping. Parents aren’t coming to help address the issue. They’re sending other people to address it. They are not supportive at all. Like they don’t even care.



Elizabeth: And they say it doesn't happen at home. They are very much in denial.

Chloe: They don't, they seem to think, or maybe in the back of their mind they know what goes on at home and that's why, but they are not going to say that. That is what I think. But then they are going to say, "He doesn't do that at home, so I don't know, it's your fault." It's you. It's the center. That would also be a turning point that we would say, "Then maybe we are not the right center for you." If you're going to blame us, which we have been blamed and those parents have been the ones that were told they need to leave. Because things got ugly after that.

In short, this example revealed that when the parents' understanding of their child's behaviors and their ways of addressing the behaviors do not align with the program's, expulsion is used or considered for use. This same perspective is also noted in Allison's discussion of an imaginary scenario.

Interviewer: I know it [expulsion] hasn't happened [in your program], but just kind of imagine, what would lead you to make the decision of using it?

Allison: If it were an extreme physical behavior that was injuring other children, if we weren't able to get on the same page with the family. We have so many resources available in this community. Some of our children, we have suggested play therapy or some sort of therapy for the children. I feel like maybe if we had parents who weren't open to suggestions, or open to helping us figure it out, or helping us to build that consistency between home and school, that it might have been a different outcome.

Across cases, there was a clear pattern that even though the severity of a child's challenging behavior may be a consideration, parents and their response or lack of response are perceived as the key factor of why children with challenging behaviors are expelled.

An additional parent factor was shared by Elizabeth and while unique for these cases is important to note.

There was an incident that happened in the morning towards my staff. If you [the parents] are going to come in and abuse my staff, yell and curse in front of a classroom, you're done. That would be automatic to me, you're done. Once the teacher told me with their written report what happened that morning, I called them and said, "Due to the situation that happened this morning, I need you to come and collect your kids and your belongings. The police will be here waiting for you."

**"Zero tolerance."** Other than the case involving the parents, all other reported incidents of expulsion involved a child's challenging behaviors. Typically, the behaviors reported were of high intensity in terms of "harmfulness". For example, in the excerpt below Samantha shared the situations in which she would consider the use of expulsion.

Samantha: It's literally a tantrum that doesn't stop or physical aggression; hitting, biting, kicking, anything like that... When a kid is really whacking on other kids, that just absolutely not. We can deal with calming a kid down if that kid's not hurting another kid. When they are hurting another kid, there's zero tolerance. Zero tolerance!

Behaviors that can cause potential harm to the child who exhibits them may also lead to expulsion. Independent of the three cases, Caroline shared an incident of expulsion at the childcare center that she previously owned.

At my center that I owned myself, I have only dis-enrolled two children. One was because we went on field trips every day in the summer and the kid just wouldn't listen. He tried to run out in the street. I grabbed him by the back of his shirt, but if I hadn't done that he would've gotten hit by a car. I said, "This is our program. We don't have another area to put him in so we have to ask you to put him in another school that can have him in a classroom instead of on field trips like we do."

**Policy versus practice.** Across all three cases, expulsion is the only type of exclusionary discipline that is directly addressed in program policies. Table 11 presents the descriptions of expulsion conditions defined by each program within their policies. The policy of the All for One center states that "*no child should be excluded...due to disruptive or challenging behaviors.*" However, examples given by the administrator as well as the teachers revealed a different practice. For instance, Samantha stated that there would be "zero tolerance" to physical aggressions causing harm to another child. Policies of both the Bright Future Child Care and the Lincoln Child Care centers prioritize the role of "dangerous" or "harmful" behaviors in making a decision to use expulsion. When reviewing the interviews, however, across these two cases the family was often noted the primary reason of why children are expelled or considered for the use of expulsion. In addition, even though the teachers have not experienced any incident of expulsion in the Bright Future Child Care and the administrator discourages the use of exclusionary discipline in general, she confirmed that they felt the need to have an explanation of the conditions that could lead to expulsion included in the parent handbook.

Allison: That [statement about expulsion] will remain in the handbook. I just talked to our board about that. They said, "Well, we really don't expel children here," but they wanted to keep that in for the "just in case." Just in case

there's ever that situation where we can't come to an agreement or it becomes a safety concern for other children, which it has been.

Childcare providers from the All for One Center also acknowledged the discrepancy between expulsion in policy to address children's behaviors and expulsion in practice to address families. In response to the discrepancy, they are currently revising their program policy to include suspension and expulsion conditions describing parents' lack of support.

Table 11

*Program Expulsion Policies*

| Program                   | Policy  |
|---------------------------|---|
| All for One Center        | All for One Center is committed to the belief that no child should be excluded from the program due to disruptive or challenging behaviors. Staff will work together with parents of children exhibiting problem behaviors, to establish an individualized plan to meet the needs to the child and to maintain a positive and safe classroom environment.   |
| Bright Future Child Care  | In the event that a child does not adjust to this program or it is determined that this program is not suitable to promoting development for a particular child, the child will be referred to a more appropriate program.<br><br>In the event that this problem cannot be settled and it is determined by the Director that the child cannot stay in the classroom, the Director shall contact the President of the Board of Directors... Bright Future Child Care shall give a ten-day notice to terminate a child's enrollment unless the child's offense is of a dangerous nature or potentially harmful to others, in which case the termination shall be immediate. |
| Lincoln Child Care Center | All reasonable attempts will be made to work with a child and family to resolve the behavior problem. If the child's placement in the classroom compromises the health, safety and/or welling being of other children or staff members, enrollment will be terminated. In this case parents will be given two weeks' notice of withdrawal except where such notice is not reasonable because of safety concerns.  |

Across cases, there was a clear pattern that program policies do not enforce program practices. In fact, a few of the childcare providers were not even aware of the existing discipline policy before their participation in this study. One participant revealed:

There was one day, and I think they were trying to get everything [program documents] together for you. I have a copy of it now, but until they were looking for it for you, I had never seen that paper in my life! There is one hanging up in my room now, but everybody in this building is different. Responses are completely different. Completely different!

In summary, three shared patterns of the use of expulsion were identified in reviewing the data: (a) expulsion to address families, (b) expulsion to address extreme behaviors (“zero tolerance”), and (c) discrepancies between policies and practices. No distinct individual case differences were found with very few variations of the three shared patterns. Two findings emerged through data analyses. First, expulsion as an exclusionary discipline is primarily used to address families including those that do not help and/or cause harm to the program. Secondly, program policies do not always align with discipline practices.

### **Summary for Research Question 3 - Exclusionary Discipline Practices**

In this section, I presented the themes that emerged related to understanding the programs’ use of expulsion and suspension practices (i.e., in-school suspension (ISS), out-of-school suspension (OSS), and expulsion). ISS was reported as commonly used in “out of control” situations in the classrooms. For example, when the challenging behavior is too overwhelming to be managed within the situation (e.g., aggression and non-compliance behaviors during nap time) and when teachers run out of strategies to address them. Two case differences or unique situations were noted. The first was that ISS was more frequently applied if a child had a diagnosis of autism. The second was that program administrators would at times

make the decision that a ISS was needed without directly consulting with the teacher. OSS was typically reported as used to address behaviors that are severe in terms of their harmfulness and/or behaviors that have a prolonged history. However, in some cases, OSS was also reported as considered in order to address family concerns and less severe behaviors but perceived to be inappropriate by childcare providers. Expulsion, on the other hand, was reported as being considered for use primarily to address concerns that the program had regarding the family's responses or lack of response.

Across the three exclusionary discipline practices, it was noted that program written policies regarding discipline practices did not directly align with actual practices reported by childcare providers in the interviews. For example, none of the three programs have written policies guiding the use of suspension and yet all programs did in fact report using the strategy. In addition, even though each program has written conditions for expulsion, these policies do not guide teachers' practices and in some cases the teachers are not even aware of the specific policy guidelines.

Finally, across cases a hierarchy across ISS, OSS, and expulsion in terms of frequency of use was noted. That is, ISS was the most frequently reported exclusionary discipline practices used, followed by OSS and expulsion. However, the conditions in which they are considered for use are not hierarchical. Although some OSS incidents were preceded by ISS and a few expulsion incidents were preceded by OSS, no linear relationship across the three practices was identified, especially when families were involved.

### **Perceived Effectiveness of Exclusionary Discipline Practices**

In this section, I present findings responding to the fourth research question (i.e., How do early educators perceive expulsion and suspension?). While there is some overlap between the

childcare providers' responses to question on their use of expulsion and suspension as described in the last section and their perceived effectiveness of these practices, in this section only the theme of effectiveness will be addressed. Furthermore, because the use of in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion share some common purposes, the three exclusionary discipline practices are treated as a whole within this section. Table 12 provides a summary of the shared purposes reported across the three practices. In the following paragraphs, I discuss each shared purpose as well as how childcare providers perceive the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline in reaching each purpose.

Table 12

*Purposes of Exclusionary Discipline Practices*

| Purposes                                      | In-School Suspension | Out-Of-School Suspension | Expulsion |
|---|----------------------|--------------------------|-----------|
| Protecting the Interests of Other Individuals | √                    | √                        | √         |
| Addressing Challenging Behaviors              | √                    | √                        | √         |
| Addressing Families                           |                      | √                        | √         |

**Protecting the Interests of Other Individuals**

As indicated in the majority of reported incidences of suspension and expulsion, exclusionary discipline was used to protect the interests of other individuals including children and adults. This was seen as providers described using ISS for aggressive and disruptive behaviors, OSS used with “harmful behaviors,” and expulsion used with behaviors that would “comprise the health, safety, and/or welling being of other children or staff members.” As Caroline shared, allowing children with challenging behaviors to stay in the classroom instead of removing them is “*not fair to the other kids.*”

Though none of the participants directly addressed the effectiveness of using expulsion and suspension to protect other individuals, their responses to other interview questions showed some important inferences. For example, Caroline said, “[When] *I had 3 kids* [with challenging behaviors] *in my room, I couldn’t handle all three at the same time and still give attention to the others. Since they have been out of my room, I have seen so many kids blossom.*” Sarah shared a challenge that she had, which is providing one-on-one attention to children with autism.

I feel it is always a challenge. Especially on a Wednesday when they don’t branch off to their other schools [public school for special education services] for help, they don’t [go] on Wednesdays. It is kind of hard to put the whole class together with them in there.

Neither of the two examples were given under the discussion contexts of expulsion and suspension practices. However, both examples indicate that other children benefit more when children with challenging behaviors are not present or are separated. Additionally, if a child exhibiting challenging behaviors is removed from the context, other individuals in the context would not be affected by the behavior. In other words, the participant were indirectly stating their belief that exclusionary discipline practices are effective when they are used to protect the interests of other individuals.

### **Addressing Challenging Behaviors**

The next intended purpose of using exclusionary discipline is to address challenging behaviors, specifically “calming the child down” following an incident and “changing” the behavior in the long run. Across cases, there was a general consensus that expulsion does not help to change challenging behaviors. Allison said, “*I really feel like if that child isn’t here, they’re going to be going somewhere else. They’re still not gaining the skills that they need.*” Elizabeth and Chloe noted that one incident would often lead to a second and a third.



Chloe: I just feel like we really try hard to work with the children and work with the families to help support them.

Elizabeth: And to keep them in one place versus we are just going to [expel]- Go to another center, what purpose is that?

Chloe: That doesn't serve the child at all. It's just a matter of time and then they [the other centers] are going to figure it out [the behaviors] and then they are going to kick them out and move them on.

In addition, there was a shared view that challenging behaviors are often not addressed by OSS either. In the following excerpt, Tisha, after having shared an incident in which OSS was used, responded to the interviewer's question as to whether she considered OSS to be effective in terms of addressing the challenging behavior.

Tisha: No, I don't really feel like anything came of it. I didn't see him at home, but he thought it was funny. He didn't feel remorseful, and he continued the behavior when he came back. It's hard to answer, because you've got to know what's going on inside the kid, their emotions and feelings. If it didn't really touch them, then nothing is going to change. If it did hurt them a little bit, like, "Oh, I can't go to school today?" or "Oh, I've got to leave school for the rest of the day," then it might be effective.

The above example infers that the effectiveness of OSS on addressing challenging behaviors is dependent on the child's perceptions of what it means to be expelled. When children are not "remorseful" or "touched," OSS fails its function as a punishment to reduce challenging behaviors. The excerpt below further illustrates that OSS not only fails its function as a

punishment but may serve as a reinforcer and thus ultimately is ineffective in alternating behaviors.

Interviewer: In what situations would you consider the use of this [OSS]?

Caroline: I wouldn't do it. It's rewarding the kid.

Interviewer: Why do you think that's rewarding the kid?

Caroline: Because they want to spend time with their parents. If the parents have to stay out of work to go home with the kid, no matter what kind of attention they [children] are getting, they are getting attention from their parent. They [the children] tell me, "I want my mommy, I want my daddy."

In contrast, the perceived effectiveness of ISS as a means to address challenging behaviors remains mixed across childcare providers. The majority of the participants believed that ISS is ineffective in reducing challenging behaviors. Taylor and Ellie used multiple forms of ISS with a child who had a prolonged history of challenging behaviors.

Taylor: We've tried to remove her from the classroom, take her outside, take her on the walk.

Ellie: Get fresh air, something.

Taylor: Maybe she's upset with the room. We take her out there, we take her down to the magic room, and she comes back up and she's still –

Ellie: Not having any of it.

Taylor: Not going to participate.

Ellie: Like, she'll be fine when she's in the magic room. And then when you bring her back upstairs, it's where she left off.

Allison echoed that she does not use ISS to address challenging behaviors because “*it creates an escape tactic*” for the children. From Caroline’s perspective, ISS is ineffective because “*even if they behave in the office, they won’t behave in the classroom.*” The excerpt shown below indicates that to some childcare providers, the frequent use of ISS may actually lead to the children developing tolerance for ISS and thus is no longer a punishment.

Elizabeth: Over the 14 years I’ve been like, “coming to my office is not productive” for certain children. For certain children it is fine...but I have just decided that coming into my office for some children that we’ve already got history on does nothing...Part of me says that bringing them into the office doesn’t work because it just leads to them being with me all the time and then they end up not even having any respect for me. If they’ve lost it for their teacher, they have none [respect to me], nobody in this building can get this child under control when they are standing in here throwing chairs at windows and across tables at teachers.

Interviewer: You don’t think it’s effective?

Elizabeth: Other than gives the teacher a break for a minute so she can get the class back into [track]–

Chloe: And the kids, yeah.

On the other hand, there were two individuals who did report that they found ISS somewhat effective when they used it as a “scare factor.” The following excerpt illustrates this perspective. In response to “*Do you find the use of ISS effective,*” one participant responded:

Without a doubt. Once they come back, they do not want to go back [to the office]. They are like, “No, I want to stay in here.” I’m like, “Thank you. That sounds like a great choice. I want you to stay in here too.”

In summary, findings across cases and across exclusionary discipline practices illustrated that suspension and expulsion are not perceived as effective practices for addressing children’s challenging behaviors. Childcare providers noted that occasionally, ISS successfully served its function as a punishment. In more situations, however, exclusionary discipline was not seen as benefiting the children in terms of reducing and alternating their challenging behaviors.

### **Addressing Families**

Two of the three exclusionary discipline practices, OSS and expulsion, were also identified as used to address concerns with families. Typically, it was reported to be used with families that are “in denial” of their child’s challenges, not willing to receive outside referrals or supports, not consistent in their expectations of their child with those of the program, and/or not contributing to their child’s positive behavioral change. In the only instance in which OSS was used to address a family, Sarah reported its failure to achieve what was intended.

I want to say “no” [OSS was not effective], because her home life is kind of crazy...I thought maybe that would be a wake-up call to her parents and they would be like, “Okay, we really need to be on board and do something about her behavior.” That is what I was kind of hoping... [After I sent her home] only one parent was on board, but they think that whooping will correct it...I don’t think that necessarily helps...To me, it is not teaching them anything.

This example demonstrates that OSS neither corrected the child’s behaviors nor addressed the program’s concern with the parents, because parents did not necessarily do what

the teacher expected, which is “*explain to them [children] why it is not okay and talk to them about different solutions that they could do, instead of just taking them home, whooping them, and then letting them go fight with their siblings.*”

The use of expulsion to address concerns with the family, however, was reported to have a different pattern. None of the programs indicated that they track what happens to a child or his/her family following expulsion. Hence, it is impossible to evaluate the effectiveness of this exclusionary discipline practice. However, across cases expulsion as a “warning” has been reported successfully addressing concerns with the family. Samantha described an instance where they called the parents in and stated that if the child’s behavior did not change and if the parents did not want to cooperate, the program would consider a removal of the child. She said, “*Things calmed down tremendously after that [meeting with the parents] ...Dad was like, ‘you know, I would like to learn more about how to be a better parent.’*”

#### **Summary for Research Question 4 - Effectiveness of Exclusionary Discipline Practices**

In this section, I examined the perceived effectiveness of exclusionary discipline in achieving three intended outcomes: protecting the interests of other individuals, addressing challenging behaviors, and addressing concerns regarding the family. Generally speaking, exclusionary discipline is successful in achieving the first outcome, but fails to address the latter two. In the majority of the situations, suspension and expulsion practices do not help to improve a child’s challenging behaviors or change a family’s practices. However, exclusionary discipline seems to work when it is used as a “warning” or “scare factor” with some children and families.

#### **Challenges and Needs of Child Care Providers**

This final section presents results in response to the fifth and sixth research questions (i.e., What challenges do early educators report encountering in promoting social emotional

development and addressing challenging behaviors? and What professional development supports do early educators report needing in order to better promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors?). In the context of this study, challenges and needs are two edges of the same sword (see Table 9 for codes related to Research Questions 5 and 6). That is, perceived challenges are indicative of areas for support; and identified needs also speak to the encountered challenges. Because the study participants directly reported more challenges than needs, this section addresses a single theme (**Theme #9 – Challenges and Needs**) highlighting the challenges as a means to infer areas for support. Across all three cases the primary topics that emerged as both challenges and areas in need of support were working with family as a challenge, workforce competence as a challenge, and profession as a challenge, as no distinct case differences were identified.

### **Family as a Challenge**

Family, particularly those of children with challenging behaviors, is one of the most consistent challenges reported by all childcare providers from the three programs. Three family related challenges were identified: parents who are not “on board,” communication with parents, and family contexts. The first representation of parents who are not “on board” is “parent in denial.” Here below is Samantha sharing her challenge.

What I am finding challenging is that a parent – young parents, especially if it's their first child-- is a little bit in denial of what goes on, and maybe you'd know this if you explored when a kid is diagnosed with autism. I've seen it personally where there is a lot of denial, “My kid is fine. My kid is fine.” The kid gets two and then three, and then if they're really in denial, [the kid is] four [years old] before they really take them in to be tested.

We have to learn to deal with parents that are in denial that there may be an issue, because they don't want to accept that.

Ellie and Taylor identified a similar challenge when Ellie said, *“We just need to figure out what to do if the parent is not compliant with getting them outside help, and if the behaviors continue.”* The excerpt below further highlights why parents “in denial” of their child’s diagnosis is a challenge to childcare providers.

We don’t diagnose so we ask them[parents] to help us in every way, if that means getting them [children] diagnosed so that we can have better understanding what triggers this child. It is so important what the parent can bring to us and help us with.

“Parents in denial” again is illustrated by Tisha sharing her challenges working with families.

Interviewer: What do you mean by parents in denial?

Tisha: Well, you know, they’ll be like, “Oh, he doesn’t act like that at home,” or just not acknowledging that, which he might not act like that at home, because there is no other children there. But they don’t even want to hear what you say about their kid, and that’s really frustrating, because your kid could have been really hurtful today, but you don’t even care to acknowledge or hear what I’m saying about him or her and their day and what I’m working. That’s when it gets kind of frustrating. It feels like they don’t believe you or they just don’t care. I don’t know. It just really gets frustrating when parents are in denial of their children’s behavior.

Besides parents in denial of their child’s disability or challenging behaviors, another characterization of parents “not on board” is not being consistent with the school practice.

Victoria reports this as her biggest challenge, *“I would say that the most challenging thing is they*

*[parents] don't do that [working on challenging behaviors] at home.*" Similarly, Sarah shares her need to have "parents on board" when she reflected on the effectiveness of prevention.

Interviewer: Do you think there are ways that we can prevent challenging behaviors?

Sarah: [Long pause] I mean... Yes, but then no, because if we are working on it with them at school, that doesn't necessarily mean that the parents will try and do the same thing at home. It is like, maybe it will work, but if the parents are not on board and doing the exact same thing that we are doing at school, then it probably might not work, in a way.

Parents who are not on board was reported by many as the biggest challenge that they encounter. As Elizabeth reported *"I think over the years I have gotten less tolerant of parent behavior and the final outcomes. I knew where it was going."*

Another reported challenge related to the child's family was communication between the childcare providers and families. A few of them expressed their own reluctance to engage in communicating to families about their children's challenging behaviors.

Taylor: Our challenge is worrying if it's going to upset the parent. Like when we let them [parents] know that they [their child] had a rough day, are they [going to say], Why were you not able to take care of that? You're the teacher. Are they going to be upset with us? Are they going to be okay? Are they going to laugh it off, or are they going to take it seriously?

Sarah also shared a similar concern related to communicating with families.

I honestly don't feel comfortable talking to the parents about it [challenging behaviors] just because I don't want them to feel like I think their child is bad and make them feel



like a bad parent because your child is having challenges in the classroom. Sometimes I don't really feel comfortable talking to them about it, especially by myself.

In addition to the hesitation of communicating with families is the perceived challenge that some parents do not want to communicate. Anna said she used both written and verbal communication strategies to connect with families. Her challenge is:

We do the daily sheets. Some parents don't read it at all. You just see it in the trash as they are leaving and it is kind of discouraging because we try to communicate, "Oh, your child learned this today, your child enjoyed this activity!" And it's usually like, "Okay, what do I really need to know?"

Family communication to Julia is also challenging not only because parents are not willing to communicate but also because she does not know a better way to communicate with families.

Sometimes it's hard when some parents don't want to communicate with you and it's really hard to try to figure out how to get them to communicate with you, because sometimes, it's like they're just wanting to drop their child off and go to work.

Furthermore, data obtained from the TPOT (Hemmeter et al., 2014) observations and interviews also revealed family communication as a challenge (Table 9). The average score across teachers on Key Practice # 13- Connecting with Families was 42.86%, meaning that on average, about 43% of the indicators under this key practice were scored "yes." The three indicators that almost all teachers received a scored of "no" were: COM6-Teacher describes ways he or she personally connects with families that indicate personal knowledge of families that indicate personal knowledge of the family situation and an appreciation for the family; COM7-Teacher states or implies that he or she uses different methods of communication with different families to ensure that an effort is made to connect with all families; and COM8-

Teacher describes communication systems with families that are bidirectional, offering families a mechanism to share information about the family or child with the teacher.

The last facet of family as a challenge is family context. In the following two examples, Samantha expressed her concerns of the impact of the family home environment and Tisha shared her challenges working with foster families.

In response to “*are there any other challenges that you can think of,*” Samantha said, “*I’ve always said divorce has such a significant impact on kids. That alone would concern me. But we’ve [also] got drug and alcohol abuse... We’ve got parents that have been using it and abusing their children and in jail from it.*”

Tisha:           With some of my foster care kids, you never know what will trigger them. You don’t know the parents, and the foster care parents don’t know much about them [children]. Me and the foster care parents were just kind of figuring out on our own as we go. That kind of was a challenge, learning the kid and building a relationship with her. But just not knowing what she had been through or why she was in foster care was definitely a challenge.

### **Workforce Competence as a Challenge**

Workforce competence is another consistent challenge reported by childcare providers across all three cases. Samantha said, “*The frustrating thing is that if a teacher is having a hard time, she doesn’t know what to do most likely. She needs to be educated and that is my job.*”

Among the majority of the teachers, there was a pervasive frustration of not knowing what to do with challenging behaviors. In the following excerpt Taylor and Ellie are describing a child with challenging behaviors.

Ellie: I honestly don't know about this girl. I don't know why she didn't want her shoelace facing left when she wanted it faced right. I have no idea.

Taylor: And you'll put her socks on 52 different ways, and they're all wrong. And then she'll go and put it on herself and that was – we did that four times.

Ellie: I don't know. That's another challenging part of it, is we don't always know what she desires.

The frustration not only comes from the lack of understandings of challenging behaviors, but also relates to not knowing the strategies to address them.

Interviewer: Do you have any challenges in terms of preventing and/or addressing challenging behaviors?

Sarah: Yes. Sometimes I feel like I don't know what I am doing.

Interviewer: You don't know why you are doing them and whether they are effective?

Sarah: Yes. They can be sometimes, but then sometimes, I am like, "Okay, they are clearly over this strategy. What else can I do?"

In fact, across the TPOT (Hemmeter et al., 2014) key practices, the average score that classrooms obtained was 33%. That is, only one third of the indicators were scored "yes", indicating the competence of the workforce to know how to prevent and address challenging behaviors was both a challenge and as an area for improvement.

The lack of available training was also identified as another reason for workforce competence as a challenge. A significant concern that was raised was that state licensing do not enforce requirements for trainings on challenging behaviors or disability diagnosis that is typically associated with challenging behaviors.

Samantha: There is nothing [in state licensing] on how to deal with challenging behaviors like autism. That is concerning to me. We are taught to change the diaper correctly. When we do online training, they tell you how to do a sanitary diaper change. But if we have an increase of [children with] autism in our preschools, why are we not taught how to deal with autism?”

Anna also shared her view of the shortcomings of the required trainings.

It was more like maybe a page or two or a sentence in a lecture. So that could be another reason that we are just not comfortable. We love the children, but we just don’t know what is best for them.” Chloe said that the state is providing training opportunities, but “these trainings are pretty much the same. They are more focused on child development. Basically, at this age they should be doing this, they should be doing that. There has not been anything good and specific to child behavior. I don’t think so.

Moreover, childcare programs generally have very limited professional development opportunities planned for childcare providers. The three participating programs only have two to four professional development days planned during the year. In addition, the plan has not been fully implemented. One participant shared that they were supposed to have three training days every year, “*But it was only supposed to.*” In addition, even though teachers may receive professional development support from outside agencies, those opportunities appear unreliable because, “*They lost the funding.*”

Lastly, professional development across all cases is generally provided in a training format without in-class coaching tailored to the teachers’ needs. However, many childcare providers identified the need to have coaching including in-class observation and in-class modeling for both children and teachers. One participant said:

They [the administrators] tried to give me pointers and stuff, but I think it's different to give pointers if you're not in here, seeing the behavior. If you're giving pointers, you need to be in here observing the classroom to see what's going on, because otherwise, you don't know what's going on, and you can talk all you want, but that doesn't mean that's going to work on that child. So, I need more support like, "Hey, I'm going to come in and observe you in your class and then see how this child behaves."

### **Profession as a Challenge**

Above I discussed workforce competence as a challenge for childcare providers, primarily due to the fact that there is a lack of training and support. However, further analysis of the data revealed that supporting childcare providers to view themselves as members of a profession that warrants respect and thus facilitates a sense of pride to engage in continuous learning and development is missing. This lack of a sense of a respected profession leads to issues in recruiting and retaining staff.

Allison: I think consistent staffing is my biggest challenge. I feel like we are making headway. Most of our lead teachers have been [here] for a year, which doesn't seem like a long time. But in this industry, it's a long time for us. I feel like they just want to know that they're recognized as professionals. They want consistent support staff in their classrooms. They want to know that the same person is going to be in their classrooms, and they're not retraining every time someone new comes into the room. It's difficult for them to be able to manage all of the children and the day-to-day activities and train new staff, which is what happens because by the time we find somebody, we need them in a room, we don't have an

opportunity to give them a 90-day trial and training period. It's you are learning as you go in the classroom.

Other childcare providers also expressed their concern around having inconsistent staffing. Tisha, who worked in both publicly funded programs (i.e. Head Start) and childcare program, said, *"I'm noticing with this field [early education and care], since I've been here for six years, no matter where you're at, we tend to have higher turnover."* Anna who has worked for her current center for less than a year shared, *"My challenge is that the leadership is constantly changing. That's a challenge because you might have somebody that's on board with this and then it's changed up. This is our second director since I've been here."*

In addition to inconsistent staffing is the challenge of work schedule and workload. The majority of the teachers worked 10 hours every day in the classrooms with the maximum allowed teacher-child ratio (e.g., one to twelve). Most of the time, teachers are by themselves during their working hours, managing the education and care for ten to 20 children. Samantha said, *"Our teachers need to be equipped with the information [about challenging behaviors], but things just happen. People are tired, they're overworked, they're exhausted, we don't have enough time."*

Allison shared that because of the massive workload that childcare providers have, she never has her teachers "all together when they're awake and alert" for teacher collaboration or professional development. Though all three participating programs reported the intention to arrange staff meetings and training opportunities, such support seems pointless due to the workload and the ineffectiveness of the trainings.

Elizabeth:     There are state-wide online trainings. I feel like they [the state] are getting better with that. But the teachers are so overwhelmed with the day and the

work. Asking them to get on an online class or go to a class after work at 6:00 is really hard. And they really don't want to do it.

Chloe: And they need that downtime away from kids. When you are with a child for 11 ½ hours out of the day, or a group of children, that's a lot. It is a lot! Parents can't even do it. These teachers, they don't want to get online, they don't want to go face-to-face and do training. Usually those trainings are only 2 hours, so you are really not getting a lot. You're not getting in the moment training which need for a child with behavior concerns.

The following example described by Allison below demonstrates how truly difficult the world of childcare and those members of the workforce can be.

Allison: We have to maintain ratios in our classrooms. Our teachers cannot leave the room, even to use the restroom, without somebody in their place. That's why we are not attracting people because that [needing to use the restroom] is a bodily function. I mean that's a health necessity. When you look at that foundation of our staff, are they valued? If they can't even leave their room to use the restroom!

In the end, factors such as lack of competence, lack of training, staff inconsistency, workload, and many others are all facets of a bigger challenge. That is, childcare as a profession is “grossly underpaid” and childcare providers are not “respected for the work they do.” As Samantha said, *“Those teachers need to be equipped with knowledge, they need more money, they need health insurance, and they need all the support they can get.”*

### **Summary for Research Questions 5 and 6 – Challenges and Needs**

In this section I argued that challenges and needs were discussed interchangeably by childcare providers. Thus, I consolidated study results for Research Questions 5 (i.e., addressing challenges) and 6 (i.e., addressing needs). The findings revealed three challenges and needs faced by childcare providers: family as a challenge, workforce as a challenge, and profession as a challenge. Family-related challenges included parents who are not “on board,” communication with parents, and family contexts. Workforce-related challenges are marked by the lack of teacher competence and the lack of training and other professional development opportunities. Lastly, childcare as a profession was also identified by the childcare providers as a challenge as it is associated with a variety of barriers such as high staff turn-over rate, inconsistent staffing, heavy workload, and lack of support in general.



## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

Expulsion and suspension of young children occur at high rates in early childhood settings especially in childcare programs that are outside of state pre-kindergartens (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Sharhar, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2014). Although a few studies have identified potential factors associated with the use of exclusionary discipline practices, no study has taken an in-depth, constructive approach. The purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the use of preschool exclusionary discipline practices (i.e., expulsion and suspension). Guided by the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006) and social constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1990), the research questions were designed to consider multi-level factors associated with the use of expulsion and suspension while prioritizing childcare providers' voices and experiences. In this chapter I will begin with a brief summary of the findings for each of the research questions. This is followed by a discussion in which the study results are connected to the overall study purpose (i.e., use of expulsion and suspension practices by early childhood programs) and how this results in a reexamination of the original conceptual framework. The chapter then concludes with a discussion of the strengths and limitations and directions for future research and practice.

### **Summary of Findings**

In response to the first research question, childcare providers' understanding of challenging behaviors, the study results showed that challenging behaviors identified by childcare providers fall under three categories: behaviors placing "somebody in harms' way," behaviors negatively affecting the interests of other individuals or the organization, and behaviors that childcare providers "have no idea" or understanding of how to address. Additionally, from the perspectives of the majority of the participants, challenging behaviors are

often linked to family-related factors as well as child-related factors that are out of their control. A third potential cause for challenging behaviors, school-related factors, while only identified in an individual case (i.e., Bright Future Child Care) is important to highlight given the support for this factor in the professional literature (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

The second research question on how childcare providers address challenging behaviors was best understood by looking separately at the use of preventative strategies and responses to the occurrence of challenging behaviors. Three preventative strategies reported as used by caregivers were noted: (a) classroom rules, schedules, and organizations, (b) building relationships, and (c) differentiations and modifications. However, while the use of the three strategies was supported across all three data sources (i.e., interviews, documents, and observations) the third strategy (i.e., differentiation and modification) was not frequently noted as implemented through the observation. Participants from two cases reported additional preventive strategies including providing support for teachers to gain skills in understanding and addressing challenging behaviors and in teaching social emotional skills. Childcare providers' perceptions of the effectiveness of behavioral prevention differed across the three cases. That is, participants from the Bright Future Child Care held a positive attitude believing that their interventions had the potential to prevent and/or change children's behaviors. The individuals (i.e., teachers and administrators) from the two other programs expressed a more uncertain view with limited confidence that their interventions would change things.

Finally, all of the childcare providers across cases reported the use of three responsive strategies following the occurrence of challenging behaviors: (a) "talking with the kiddo," (b) separation, and (c) involvement of family. While all three strategies were noted across programs, both separation and the involvement of families were enacted in somewhat different ways. First,

separation was at times presented as a demand and other times as a choice. When presented as a choice, the teachers noted that it was not used as a punishment but rather as an opportunity for the child to calm down or have some space for quiet time. However, it was also at times presented as a demand (i.e., You are not acting right ... You need to go sit...). The “location” for separation when a choice or a demand, however was not different, which could lead to confusion on the child’s part. While across programs there was high consistency in involving families for the purpose of informing parents of the situation and asking parents to be consistent with what programs are doing or what programs expect them to do, there was less consistency in other purposes for involving families. For two of the programs involving the family essentially focused on a role for the family as an information resource or passive recipient of information from the program. One program did report that there were times in which they involved families more as collaborative partners in designing and implementing behavioral plans.

The third research question, addressing the use of suspension and expulsion was approached by analyzing findings relevant to the use of in-school suspension, out-of-school suspension, and expulsion. The results indicated that the use of out-of-school suspension and expulsion are highly consistent across the three programs in terms of the conditions that called for their use. Out-of-school suspension was reported to be generally used with behaviors that have either high levels of severity or a prolonged history. Expulsion was reported to be applied to address family issues and/or extreme child behaviors that pose dangers to individuals and organizations. The reasons to make the decision to use in-school-suspension, however, varied greatly across programs. Specifically, different definitions of what child behaviors warranted in-school-suspension included how the teacher defined “out of control” behavior and in one instance whether a child had a diagnosed disability (e.g., child with autism frequently was given

in-school suspension). Additionally, the use of in-school-suspension was influenced by the administrators view of their role in the implementation. That is, some administrators viewed that they were the primary decision makers whereas another saw their role as supporting the teacher.

The fourth research question, addressing the childcare providers' perceptions of the use of suspension and expulsion practices, was examined by analyzing their perceptions of the effectiveness of exclusionary discipline practices in addressing the participants reported intended purposes (i.e., protecting the interests of other individuals, addressing challenging behaviors, and addressing family concerns). The results revealed that exclusionary discipline is generally successful in achieving the first purpose but fails to address the latter two. In the majority of the situations, the participants noted that suspension and expulsion practices did not help to decrease a child's challenging behaviors or change a family's practices. However, the participants did believe that exclusionary discipline could at times be effective when it is used as a "warning" or "scare factor" with some children and families.

The last two research questions, (i.e., challenges faced and professional development needs reported by childcare providers regarding challenging behaviors), were addressed by examining challenges that childcare providers encounter and supports that they need to promote children's social emotional development and address challenging behaviors. Across all three programs the following three challenges were reported: working with families, workforce competence, and the profession of childcare. Family-related challenges included parents who are not "on board," communication with parents, and family contexts. Workforce-related challenges are marked by the lack of teacher competence and the lack of training and other professional development opportunities. Lastly, childcare as a profession was also identified by the childcare

providers as a challenge as it is associated with a variety of barriers such as high staff turn-over rate, inconsistent staffing, heavy workload, and lack of support in general.

### **Examination of the Conceptual Framework**

In an effort to discuss how the explorations of the six research questions contribute to the understanding of the use of early childhood exclusionary discipline practices, the study findings were consolidated into a data matrix (Miles et al., 2014). The data matrix (See Table 13) highlights factors associated with each research question attending to both across-case findings and case differences. For example, the factor “interests of others” (highlighted in yellow in Table 13) emerged across themes 1( identification of challenging behavior) related to research question 1, theme 4 (response to challenging behavior) related to research question 2, and themes 5 (in-school suspension), 6 (out of school suspension), 7 (expulsion), and 8 (effectiveness of suspension and expulsion) all related to research questions 3 and 4. This coding process resulted in the identification of five factors (i.e. children with challenging behaviors, interests of others, families, childcare programs and providers, and social political factors) that are critical in furthering our understanding of the use of expulsion and suspension practices and lead to a need to reexamine the original conceptual framework. That is, based on the literature review, I proposed that the use of expulsion and suspension practices can be understood through examination of factors operating within three system levels: the microsystems, the mesosystems, and the exosystems. In the following sections, I discuss how the study findings align with and/or call for an adjustment and/or expansion of the framework by discussing each level (i.e., microsystem, mesosystem, and exosystem).

Table 13

*Consolidation of All Findings*

| RQ  | Themes  | Across-Case Findings                           |   |   |                                   | Case Differences                                     |                                  |
|-----|---|--|---|---|-----------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|
|     |   | 1st  | 2nd   | 3rd   | AOC                               | BFCC   | LCCC                             |
| 1   | Theme #1: Identifications of Challenging Behavior         | Interests of others                            | Teacher knowledge and competence  |   |                                   |  |                                  |
|     | Theme #2: Attribution of Challenging Behavior             | Family Environment and Family Practice         | Children who exhibit challenging behaviors  |   |                                   | School and teacher                                   |                                  |
| 2   | Theme #3: Preventative Strategies of Challenging Behavior | Classroom rules, schedules, and organizations  | Building relationships  | Differentiations and modifications  | Teacher competence                | Teacher competence, teaching social-emotional skills |                                  |
|     | Perceived Effectiveness                                   |  |   |   | Conditional (Family)              | Positive   | Conditional (Family)             |
|     | Theme #4: Response to Challenging Behavior                | Most immediate response: talking with the kid  | Separation for: (1) interests of others and (2) changing the behaviors            | Involving families  | Data collection                   | Data collection; Differential reinforcement          | Police involvement               |
| 3&4 | Theme #5: In-School Suspension                            | Interests of others, administrator perspective | teacher knowledge and competence,   |   | Differential treatment for autism | Not encouraged by leadership                         | Supported by leadership          |
|     | Theme #6: Out-Of-School Suspension                        | Interests of others                            | Teacher knowledge and competence  |   | Addressing families               |  |                                  |
|     | Theme #7: Expulsion                                       | Addressing families                            | Interests of others   | Discrepancy between policy and practice                                   |                                   |  |                                  |
|     | Theme #8: Effectiveness of Suspension and Expulsion       | Effective for interests of others              | OSS and Expulsion not effective in addressing children with challenging behaviors | OSS not effective and expulsion somewhat effective in addressing families | ISS is ineffective                | ISS is ineffective                                   | ISS is effective as a punishment |
| 5&6 | Theme #9: Challenges and Needs                            | Family   | Teacher competence and knowledge  | Childcare Profession  |                                   |  |                                  |

Note: AOC= All for One Center; BCC= Bright Future Child Care; LCCC=Lincoln Child Care Center; RQ=Research Question.

Color Coding for Revising the Conceptual Framework: Children with Challenging Behaviors; Interests of Others; Families; Childcare Programs and Providers; Social Political Factors.

## **Microsystems: Family and Program**

The microsystem in the initial conceptual framework was defined as the direct social structure in which individuals operate on a daily basis. Relevant to the study purpose, the key individuals involved in the context of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices include children with challenging behaviors, teachers, and administrators. The microsystems are composed of the classrooms and the childcare programs. The study findings, however, warrant a revision of the components within the microsystems by specifically adding the child's family.

First, families appear to be a key factor related to the use of expulsion and suspension practices in childcare programs. Families are perceived by childcare providers as the cause of their children's challenging behaviors, a primary factor in determining whether or not prevention and intervention strategies would be effective, the reason why the most severe forms of exclusionary discipline (i.e., out-of-school suspension and expulsion) are necessary, and one of the greatest challenges reported by the childcare providers, both teachers and administrators in their efforts to promote children's social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors (See Table 13).

Even though there is a dearth of research on understanding how childcare providers' perceptions of families impacts the implementation of exclusionary discipline practices, family studies, disability studies, as well as research on challenging behaviors have provided some potential clues. Historically, a number of political and social movements, such as America's eugenics movement (1880-1930) accused parents of being the source or cause of their child's disability and misconduct, calling for actions to eliminate or reduce the number of "unfit" families (Barr, 1913; Turnbull, Turnbull, Erwin, Soodak, & Shogren, 2015). Even with a century of efforts to correct the deficit views of individuals with disabilities and their families, negative

perceptions of families remain relatively unchanged (Gallagher, Fialka, Rhodes, & Arceneaux, 2002; Lalvani & Polvere, 2013; Lalvani, 2015; Turnbull et al., 2015). In an early study, Essa (1998) conducted six focus groups with 42 childcare providers and found that in 22% of the discussion about attributions, home and family were cited as causes for children's misbehaviors. Similarly, Smith (2009) interviewed parents of teenagers who had been excluded from school in New Zealand and found that parents reported feeling criticized for not taking responsibility for their child's education and thus blamed for their child's misconduct. Thus, because of the participants' negative perceptions of families as well as the repeated reporting of the causal relationship between families and their children's challenging behaviors, I argue that family, although not directly involved in their child's misconduct in the classroom and/or the program, is an important aspect of the microsystem and should be included in the conceptual framework.

Second, the assumption that programs and classroom are at two distinct level of the system warrants adjustment as a result of the findings. In this study, administrators and teachers within each program shared similar narratives in response to each research question with no distinct differences identified, yielding a high degree of harmony between classroom and program practices. In addition, differences across cases also support the need to combine classroom and program as one microsystem. For example, the Bright Future Child Care had the highest scores on TPOT and reported the most infrequent use of expulsion and suspension compared to other cases, which likely was related to the emphasis reported by the participants on the teaching of social emotional skills and professional development activities and other supports provided to enhance teacher competence. On the other hand, the Lincoln Child Care Center reported the most frequent use of in-school-suspension, which aligns with the program



administrators stated beliefs about its use and the teachers' beliefs about and lack of understanding of effectiveness of evidence-based preventive and responsive strategies.

Although there is no empirical or conceptual work investigating the correspondence and/or difference between program (or school) and classroom practice in the area of early childhood exclusionary discipline, research on school climate often defines classroom “teaching and learning” as a major aspect of school life that shapes school climate (Cohen, 2006; Freiberg, 1999). Particularly, Cohen, McGabe, Michelli, and Pickeral (2009) argued that both leadership (school-level) as well as quality of instruction (classroom-level) are aspects of “teaching and learning.” In agreement with the conceptual work on school climate, Skiba et al. (2014) in their investigation of the various factors contributing to out-of-school suspension and expulsion grouped all classroom- and school-related factors into one. Other studies, such as Kinsler (2013) and Sheets (1996), also interchangeably investigated classroom- and school-related factors, indicating that classroom and school can be combined as one microsystem.

Based on the study results as well as other empirical findings, conceptualization of the microsystem in terms of understanding the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices has been revised. That is, family and program should be included as two immediate social organizations with direct impact on children with challenging behaviors as well as on the decision making that occurs around the use of expulsion and suspension practices.

### **Mesosystems: Confrontational Relationships**

The mesosystem in the conceptual framework refers to the interconnectedness between different microsystems. Therefore, based on the original conceptualization, the interactions between classrooms and childcare programs were the main focus of the mesosystem as it relates to understanding early childhood expulsion and suspension practices. However, due to the

revision of the microsystems as presented in the previous section, the characterizations of the mesosystem are also adjusted.

In consonance with previous research (e.g., Bowman-Perro et al., 2011; Morris & Howard, 2003; Skiba, 2002; Skiba & Rausch, 2006), the study findings indicate that the relationship between children with challenging behaviors and others (i.e., other children, teachers, and administrators), as perceived by childcare providers, is an important factor impacting the use of exclusionary discipline practices. The interests of others appear to be a paramount consideration in many decisions made about children with challenging behaviors. According to the study findings, many childcare providers identified challenging behaviors with reference to harm and disruption. Furthermore, regardless of the general perception that separation and exclusionary discipline practices are ineffective in changing children's challenging behaviors, these procedures are perceived by childcare providers as necessary to protect the interests of other children, teachers, and schools.

Expulsion and suspension, as two products of the "zero tolerance" movement, were designed to ensure the safety of students and teachers and to promote a safe school climate (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Skiba & Rausch, 2006). Although the intended application of "zero tolerance" was to address behaviors involving severe infractions such as drug possession, weapons use, or violent criminal activities (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003), a body of literature revealed that many students were excluded and suspended from school for nonviolent and noncriminal infractions (e.g., Legislative Analyst's Office, State of California, 1995). Even though no identified study has investigated the type of behaviors for which preschool children are being expelled and/or suspended, the literature on K-12 exclusionary discipline demonstrated that both elementary and secondary students are suspended

and expelled most frequently for defiance and disruption (Bain & MacPherson, 1990; Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziegenberg, 1999; Cooley, 1995; Dupper & Bosch, 1996; Gregory & Weinstein, 2008; Morgan-D'Atrio, Northrup, LaFleur, & Spera, 1996; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003) followed by moderate infractions (i.e., fighting, verbal aggression, destruction of property; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Skiba et al., 2014). These studies found that when a student's misconduct interferes and threatens the interests of other students, teachers, classroom environment, and school climate, expulsion and suspension are considered across a wide span of challenging behaviors (Adams, 1992; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2003; Gottfredson et al., 2005; Morris & Howard, 2003; U.S. Department of Education, 2002). Hence, the confrontational relationship noted by participants between young children with challenging behaviors and others is considered as an important mesosystem component in understanding the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices.

In addition, the current study findings also indicate that from childcare providers' perspectives, it is not just children with challenging behaviors being a problematic factor, but also families of these children. Specifically, family environments and family practices are seen as a cause of challenging behaviors. Furthermore, the family's role was frequently viewed as primarily a passive recipients of information about their children and at other times blamed for not helping with either preventative or reactive strategies to address challenging behaviors. Furthermore, the primary purpose of using the most severe form of exclusionary discipline (i.e., expulsion) was reported to address "noncompliant" families.

To date, this study may be the first that explored and found that childcare providers' characterizations of families play an important role in their decision to use expulsion and suspension practices. Therefore, the study results should be tentatively interpreted considering

the small number of participants represented. A recent study conducted by Parker, Paget, Ford, and Gwernan-Jones (2016), however, found similar results with older children. In this study, 35 parents of 37 children aged 5-12 years from the Southwest of England were interviewed to share their experiences and perspectives in regard to their children's expulsion. Some parents reported being stigmatized or perceived as interfering by the school. Parents also emphasized that there were many communication difficulties hindering the relationships between family and school, which in turn heightened the sense of blame between parties.

Not only in the area of exclusionary discipline, but also in all aspects of schooling, family-school collaborations and partnerships have been discussed in the literature as not always successfully implemented (Brotherson et al., 2010; Harry, 2008; Harry & Klingner, 2014; Kalyanpur & Harry, 1999; Rainforth, York, & Macdonald, 1992; Salembier & Furney, 1998). Family members who are not able to attend school events and who are inconsistent with school practices and expectations are often seen as "uncaring" (Harry, 2008; Jones & Valez, 1997; Ramirez, 1996, 1997, 1999). Hierarchical relationships between families and professionals and unequal power distributions were also found by Blue-Banning, Turnbull, and Pereira (2002). That is, family members were not seen as equal partners and professionals maintained control, for example by advising parents and by expecting parents to act accordingly. These findings, along with the results of other studies (e.g., Cheatham & Ostrosky, 2011, Harry & Klingner, 2014; Harry, Rueda, & Kalyanpur, 1999; Turnbull & Barber, 1996) suggest that professionals may often hold a deficit view of families including families of children with challenging behaviors. These negative perceptions of families as well as the perceived, confrontational relationship between family and the program are another mesosystem aspect of the mesosystem

that must be considered to further our understanding of the use of early childhood exclusionary discipline.

In summary, with the revisions of the microsystems, I adjust the characterizations of the mesosystems to reflect the change as well. Specifically, following the identification of family being an important microsystem component and the combination of classroom and program in the microsystem level, I redefine the mesosystem for understanding early childhood exclusionary discipline practices by highlighting the interaction between children with disabilities and others as well as the interaction between family and program.

### **Exosystem: Childcare as a Profession**

According to the bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006), the exosystem refers to the social, cultural and political contexts including policy, regulation, and infrastructure. To attend to the exosystem in the context of early childhood exclusionary discipline, I reviewed state and program policies as well as the alignment and/or discrepancy between policy and practice. The study findings indicate that the exosystem with multiple facets, particularly the various characteristics of childcare as a profession affects the use of expulsion and suspension practices. Specifically, the quality of teaching was not found to meet the growing needs of children with challenging behaviors. Across all research questions, a common response by childcare providers was “I don’t know.” In many situations, childcare providers were uncertain about what triggers and how to address challenging behaviors. Reactive strategies marked by separation were more often applied by childcare providers than preventative strategies. Childcare providers suspended and expelled children because they ran out of ideas or strategies to cope with challenging behaviors.

A body of literature investigating challenging behaviors and workforce competence has also found similar results (Institute of Medicine and National Research Council, 2015).

Specifically, in the authors of a review for the National Research Council noted that research-based effective teaching and learning practices ground in child development knowledge are not sufficiently applied in childcare settings. In addition, studies using survey, focus group, and interviews have found that many childcare providers do not have the skills to promote social emotional development or address challenging behaviors (Cohen & Kaufmann, 2000; Dunlap, Lee, Joseph, & Strain, 2015; Quesenberry, Hemmeter, & Ostrosky, 2011; Smith, 2006; Vihn et al., 2016).

Beyond the lack of teacher competence, this study also found that childcare providers are not supported through professional development activities to address challenging behaviors. The three participating programs only planned for two to four professional development days every year; however, the plan often was not fully realized. In addition, the state where the programs are located does not mandate trainings related to children's social emotional development or challenging behaviors, leaving programs and childcare providers on their own to search for professional development opportunities on these topics. In consonance with the results of this study, the 2012 National Survey of Early Care and Education found that fewer than 20% of childcare providers reported participating in trainings with regard to facilitating children's social emotional development.

The above findings revealed that the lack of teacher competence and lack of professional development support are two factors constructing the exosystem of early childhood exclusionary discipline. Furthermore, the study results also disclose that these two factors are only facets of a bigger system-level problem. That is, childcare as a profession has not been valued or supported.

Historically, childcare as a profession was not associated with an educational function but seen as a support system for working families (Buch & Ambrosino, 2004; Child Care Aware, 2017; Mcfarlane & Lewis, 2012). However, the traditional view of childcare has slowly changed as a result of research investigating child development and early childhood education. Specifically, empirical evidence supporting the importance of the early foundations of learning and wellness needed for success in school and later in life has supported the need for high-quality early childhood programs that serve public interests and educational function (e.g., Head Start Act, 2007). By 2016, 55% of children were provided early care and education by childcare programs outside of the state prekindergarten systems (U. S. Department of Education, 2006), indicating that childcare programs have become a primary educational placement for young children.

Regardless of their social and political importance, childcare programs have been suffering from underfunding, under-resourcing, and a lack of support for many years (Mcfarlane & Lewis, 2012). The annual report by Child Care Aware (Child Care Aware, 2017) found that in 2016, the average annual salary for about 2.2 million childcare classroom staff in the United States was \$22,310, only slightly above the annual earning for a full-time minimum-wage worker. In fact, more than half of the participating teachers in this study received some form of federal financial support including Child Care Development Block Grant (CCDBG) subsidies. A consequence of underfunding and under-resourcing is that childcare as a profession does not attract or retain high quality staff. Gable and Cole (2000) reported that around one-third childcare workers leave their jobs on an annual basis, creating an ever-changing and inconsistent early learning environment for children including those who exhibit challenging behaviors. In addition, as shown in this study and also found by a few other researchers (e.g., Gable & Cole, 2000; Wolery et al., 2002), childcare programs tend to enroll the maximum number of children

and equip each classroom with the minimum number of teachers allowed by their licensing requirements, which creates a stressful and overwhelming working environment for many childcare providers. With previous findings showing that large class size and elevated teacher job stress were strong predictors of the use of early childhood exclusionary discipline (Gilliam & Shahar, 2006), the results of this study indicate that the challenges faced by childcare as a profession also reflect the broader social, cultural, and political context of early childhood exclusionary discipline practices. Therefore, the many realities and characteristics of childcare as a profession are conceptualized as the exosystem of early childhood expulsion and suspension.

### **Summary**

In summary, in connecting the findings of this study and findings of previous research across a range of disciplines, I revisited the conceptual framework of the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension. In alignment with the current study results, I included family as an important microsystem, emphasized the interaction between children with challenging behaviors and others and between family and school as the major mesosystems, and expanded the exosystem by reviewing childcare as a profession in the social context.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

Guided by a mixed-method research approach, this study applied several research methods to gain an in-depth understanding of the decision-making process regarding early childhood expulsion and suspension. Prioritizing data obtained from several rounds of participant interviews, this study highlighted the voices of childcare providers, listened to their experiences with and challenges about children's challenging behaviors, and included other data sources (i.e., classroom observations and document analyses) with careful attention to interpretation trustworthiness.



The few pilot studies on the prevalence of early childhood expulsion and suspension have gained some public attention on this topic in the last few years. However, there remains a dearth of research guiding and contributing to our understanding of early childhood expulsion and suspension. To address the research gap, this study was conducted to obtain an in-depth exploration of relevant factors centering on childcare providers' views and voices regarding the decision-making process of expulsion and suspension. To date, this study may be the first that interviewed administrators and teachers of childcare programs and explored their characterizations of families in addressing and disciplining children with challenging behaviors. Nonetheless, there are several limitations of this study that require further discussion.

First, the study was conducted across a limited time. Although time was sufficient in answering the research questions, some researchers (e.g., Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klinger, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005) suggest that prolonged field engagement could increase the credibility of a study.

Second, although this study used several methods of triangulation to address trustworthiness, only two individuals were actively involved in conceptualization, data collection, data analyses, and result interpretation. The use of additional researchers, evaluators, and peer debriefers could potentially contribute to a more in-depth description of the cases as well as the credibility of this study (Brantlinger et al., 2005).

Third, the general challenges of childcare as a profession were also encountered by this study in terms of staff turn-over and their working schedule. Two of the study participants left their professional positions within their programs immediately after completion of data collection for this study, leaving no time for member checks with these two participants. Some participants' work schedules did not allow a 90-minute interview in a day; a few participants'

classroom schedules also limited the length of TPOT observation. Throughout the course of the study, I monitored research quality while accommodating the participants' challenges and needs, though one could argue that the unavoidable flexibility involved could compromise study trustworthiness.

Lastly, I found myself not being able to maintain neutrality at all time even with frequent reflections on my biases as well as my positioning during the interviews. For example, when the participants brought up an incident where the police department was involved in disciplining a 4-year-old boy, I did not maintain neutrality due to my political views and many emotions related to being an early educator. I shared during the interview that involving the justice system into early care and education could be dangerous and result in adverse consequences. Reflecting back on similar moments during the study, I recognize the need to continue enhancing my own credibility as a researcher.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Based on the strengths and limitations of this study, I discuss several possibilities to continue investigating early childhood expulsion and suspension and to ultimately reduce and eliminate the use of exclusionary discipline. Foremost, even with the effort of this study, there is still very limited research directly addressing early childhood expulsion and suspension. Although studies in other disciplines provide valuable information for conceptualization and interpretation of this topic, such findings should be carefully attended to consider the context of early childhood education and care. In addition, among the handful of studies that investigated early childhood expulsion and suspension, almost all applied survey method and statistical analysis to untangle factors related to exclusionary discipline. Future research can continue investigating this critical issue and diversify research methodologies to obtain a more in-depth

and holistic understanding of early childhood expulsion and suspension. For example, action research to systematically evaluate the effect of professional development on changing the perspectives and practices of early childhood expulsion and suspension.

Furthermore, the experiences of families of children expelled and suspended from school across different grade levels are often unheard (McDonald & Thomas, 2003; Parker et al., 2016). The present study found that in the majority of incidents, expulsion was applied to address families instead of children with challenging behaviors, yielding the need to bring family voices into the research schema. In addition, family-school collaboration seems to be the key factor of many school decisions regarding preventing and responding to challenging behaviors. Therefore, it is important to bring families' voices into the discussions and further investigate family-school collaboration and its role in the decision making regarding children's expulsion and suspension.

Moreover, although there have been some studies that investigated secondary students' perspective of exclusion from school (e.g., Daniels et al. 2003; Hayden & Dunne, 2001), voices and experiences of young children remain unheard. Among various stakeholders involved in decision-making about expulsion and suspension, young children, particularly those with challenging behaviors, seem to be the most powerless. As the data indicated in the present study, one child was simply expelled from school because of the conflict between his father and the school, independent of his behaviors. Although obtaining and interpreting young children's experiences and views of exclusion may be practically challenging, future research can navigate creative ways to bring children's voices to the discussion of early childhood expulsion and suspension. For instance, interview (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010), focus group (Darbyshire, Macdougall, & Schiller, 2005; David, 2001; Horowitz et al., 2003), drawing (Blaut, Stea, Spencer, & Blades, 2003; Elden, 2013; Leonard, 2006; Morrow, 2003), and

photovoice (Booth & Booth, 2003; Darbyshire et al., 2005) to promote children's voices and representation in the research process.

### **Implications for Practice and Policy**

In addition to implications for research, the study findings also provide some suggestions for practice and policy in terms of why childcare programs outside of state-funded prekindergarten systems have higher expulsion and suspension rates. It is worth noticing that the state where the three childcare programs are located does not have policies regulating the use of expulsion and suspension practices at the early childhood level. In addition, there was a clear discrepancy between policy and practice across all three programs. Although no study has investigated the relationship between program discipline policy and the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices, there is empirical evidence showing that state funded and regulated prekindergarten systems including Head Start programs have lower rates of expulsion and suspension compared with those of childcare programs (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahar, 2006). Contrary to childcare programs that are not regulated in the use of expulsion and suspension practices, the Head Start Program Performance Standards (2016) strictly prohibit programs from expelling children from Head Start because of a child's behavior and require programs to severely limit the use of suspension due to a child's behavior. Even though there are many structural differences between publicly funded early childhood programs and childcare programs, the quality and implementation of discipline policy can be an explanation of why childcare programs outside of state-funded prekindergarten systems have higher expulsion and suspension rates. Hence, in agreement with the recommendations to early childhood programs and states by the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education (2014), this study suggests that childcare programs and states must establish discipline policies that eliminate

or severely limit expulsion and suspension practices and such policies should be clearly communicated to and implemented by all childcare providers.

In addition, the current study findings also implied that both childcare providers' perceptions and practices are related to the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension. On the one hand, there was a pervasive, deficit view of families and children with challenging behaviors among the childcare providers. Many of the childcare providers believed that exclusionary discipline practices are necessary to protect the interests of other individuals and organizations and to address families that are "noncompliant." On the other hand, the childcare providers also reported significant frustration in not knowing what triggers challenging behaviors, how to prevent and/or respond to challenging behaviors, and how to involve and collaborate with families. With this strong sense that they lack knowledge and competence, childcare providers tended to default to reactive and exclusionary discipline practices to address challenging and "out-of-control" situations. Thus, another implication for practice and policy is that in order to reduce and eventually eliminate the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension practices, supports at different levels must focus on changing both the perceptions (Devine, Forscher, Austin, & Cox, 2012; Gilliam et al., 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Okonofua, Walton, & Eberhardt, 2016; Skiba et al., 2011) and the practices (Cohen & Kaufmann, 2000; Dunlap et al., 2015; Gilliam, 2005; Quesenberry et al., 2011; Smith, 2006; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and Education, 2014; Vinh et al., 2016) of childcare providers.

Finally, the current study found that various barriers and challenges encountered by childcare providers have made exclusionary discipline a possibility. These challenges are marked by the lack of workforce competence, lack of professional development support, and issues related to the lack of childcare viewed by the public as well as the individuals themselves as a

profession. In the policy statement on expulsion and suspension policies in early childhood settings, the U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education (2014) made multiple recommendations in regard to the first two challenges. However, such recommendations limit the discussion to the program-level and neglect the bigger challenges that childcare programs are facing, such as underfunding, under-resourcing, and continued budget-cuts. With the empirical evidence supporting the importance of high quality early education and care, childcare programs have been increasingly expected to serve an educational function and prepare children for success in school and later in life (Buch & Ambrosino, 2004; ChildCareAware, 2017; Mcfarlane & Lewis, 2012; U. S. Department of Education, 2006). Yet, compared with educators in other grade levels (e.g., secondary education) and early educators working for other program structures (e.g., public preschool and Head Start), childcare providers are untrained, underpaid, under-supported, and devalued (Child Care Aware, 2017; Gable & Cole, 2000; Gable & Halliburton, 2003). In alignment with this study's findings, another implication for practice and policy is that the problem of expulsion and suspension will not be solved until systematic efforts are in place to address challenges that childcare programs face. As one participant stated at the end of her interview, "Maybe if early education were in the public school system or recognized as such, it would be [the end of expulsion and suspension]."

### **Conclusion**

Increasing children's access to safe, accessible, and high-quality child care is a shared goal for policy makers and early care and education professionals across states and local communities in the United States. However, recent data indicate that exclusionary practices occur at high rates in early childhood settings (Gilliam, 2005; Gilliam & Shahrar, 2006; U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, 2014), yielding a major threat to children's

access to early care and education opportunities. Although a handful of studies have investigated and raised public awareness of this issue, no identified study has taken an in-depth approach to untangle the factors related to the use of early childhood expulsion and suspension. To fill the research gap, this study funded by U.S. Department of Health and Human Services applied a mixed-method research design to obtain rich and contextual information about early childhood exclusionary discipline practices.

The study asked six research questions related to childcare practices, provider perceptions, and challenges encountered to approach the research purpose. Among the various study findings, perhaps the most important one is that the most severe form of early childhood exclusionary discipline practices (i.e., expulsion) is being applied to address families instead of children's challenging behaviors, leading to a further question of "who is being expelled from early childhood settings, children and/or families?" In this study, the majority of the childcare providers were aware of the ineffectiveness of expulsion and suspension in changing children's challenging behaviors. However, many of them believed that having exclusionary discipline as a viable option is necessary to protect the interests of others and to address noncompliant families.

Throughout the course of the study, I was fortunate to have 11 participants who trusted me, generously shared their experiences and perspectives, and allowed me to be in their classrooms observing the dynamics of teaching and learning. From an objective worldview, I acknowledge the multiple areas for improvement for the childcare providers including deficit views of families and children with challenging behaviors and the use of non-evidence-based, reactive, and exclusive discipline practices. Yet from a subjective worldview, I recognize that childcare providers' perspectives and practices are highly contextualized and socially constructed, which requires more support and resources to address the issue of expulsion and

suspension. Importantly, the mixed-method design allows me to have a plural worldview and learn from this study that much public criticism of early childhood expulsion and suspension has focused on early education and care providers, yet the society and the public as a whole have not provided enough supports to prevent this phenomenon from happening.



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## Appendix A: IRB Approval of Protocol



### APPROVAL OF PROTOCOL

January 17, 2018

Zhe An  
zhe.an.gigi@ku.edu

Dear Zhe An:

On 1/17/2018, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| Type of Review:     | Initial Study   |
| Title of Study:     | Reducing Expulsion and Suspension by Coaching Early Educators   |
| Investigator:       | Zhe An  |
| IRB ID:             | STUDY00141655   |
| Funding:            | Name: US Dept of Health & Human Svcs  |
| Grant ID:           |   |
| Documents Reviewed: | • 20171230 An HHS Grant Administrator Consent.docx, • 20171230 An HHS Grant Parent Consent.docx, • 20171230 An HHS Grant Teacher Descriptive Study Consent.docx, • 20171230 An HHS Grant Teacher Intervention Study Consent.docx, • 20171230 Initial Meeting Talking Points.docx, • 20171230 IRB Feedback.docx, • 20171230 Parent Introduction Letter.docx, • 20171230 Recruitment Email.docx, • An HHS Grant Application.pdf, • An HHS Grant Award Letter.pdf, • An HHS Grant Child Assent.docx, • An HHS Grant IRB V3.pdf |

The IRB approved the study from 1/17/2018 to 1/16/2019.

1. Before 1/16/2019 submit a Continuing Review request and required attachments to request continuing approval or closure.
2. Any significant change to the protocol requires a modification approval prior to altering the project.
3. Notify HRPP about any new investigators not named in original application. Note that new investigators must take the online tutorial at [https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human\\_subjects\\_compliance\\_training](https://rgs.drupal.ku.edu/human_subjects_compliance_training).
4. Any injury to a subject because of the research procedure must be reported immediately.
5. When signed consent documents are required, the primary investigator must retain the signed consent documents for at least three years past completion of the research activity.

If continuing review approval is not granted before the expiration date of 1/16/2019 approval of this protocol expires on that date.

Please note university data security and handling requirements for your project:  
<https://documents.ku.edu/policies/IT/DataClassificationandHandlingProceduresGuide.htm>

You must use the final, watermarked version of the consent form, available under the "Documents" tab in eCompliance.

Sincerely,

Jocelyn Isley, MS, CIP  
IRB Administrator, KU Lawrence Campus

## Appendix B: Recruitment Email

**From:** An, Zhe zhe.an.gigi@ku.edu  
**Subject:** KU Early Childhood Research Study  
**Date:** [REDACTED]  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]

AZ

Dear [REDACTED]

My name is Zhe An (Gigi). I am a doctoral candidate in the KU Department of Special Education under Dr. Eva Horn. The intent of this email is to ask for your assistance with a dissertation study grant that we were recently awarded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This dissertation study has two purposes: (1) understanding the use of preschool expulsion and suspension practices, and (2) using professional development (staff training and on-going coaching) to increase classroom staff's confidence and competence in addressing challenging behaviors and promoting young children's social emotional development.

For the purposes of this study, we are particularly seeking early childhood programs that serve children from high-need, low-income families. We are hoping that the [REDACTED] Center might be interested in participating. If you are interested in learning more about the study, please reply to this email or call [REDACTED] so that we can set up an appointment to provide further information.

Thank you in advance for your interest. We look forward to hearing from you!

Best,  
Gigi and Eva

Zhe An (Gigi)  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special Education  
University of Kansas  
512-954-3660  
[zhe.an.gigi@ku.edu](mailto:zhe.an.gigi@ku.edu)

Eva Horn, PhD  
University of Kansas  
Professor &  
Coordinator of Early Childhood Unified Program  
[Department of Special Education](#)  
785-864-0615  
[evahorn@ku.edu](mailto:evahorn@ku.edu)

## Appendix C: Initial Meeting Talking Points

### Initial Meeting Talking Points

*(Answer questions as the conversation goes)*

#### Self-Introduction

- Eva Horn
- Zhe An (Gigi)

#### Research Background

- Research Topic: expulsion and suspension

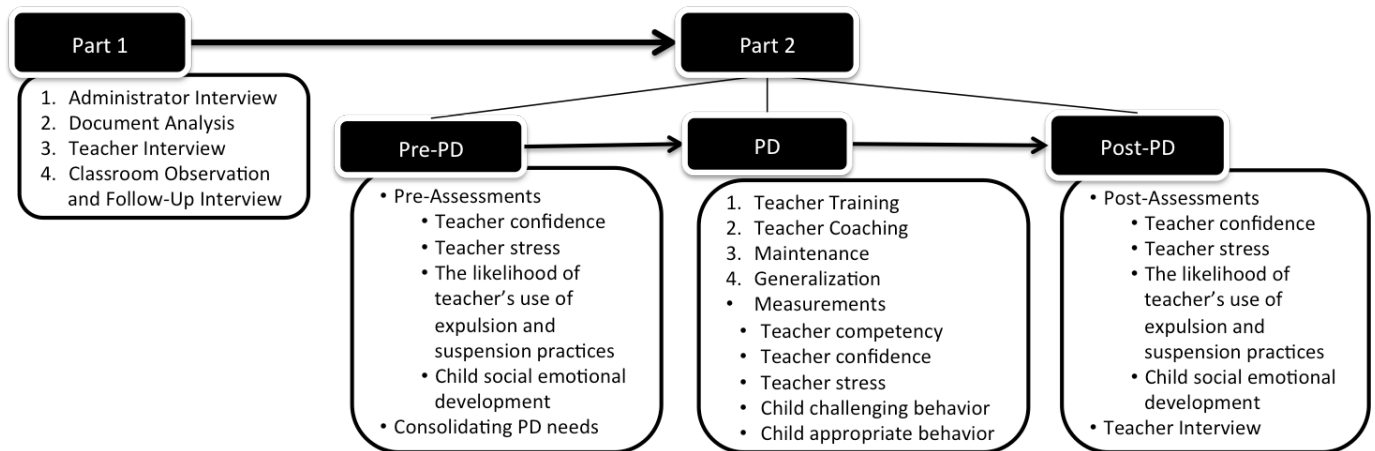
#### Research Purposes

1. Gain an understanding of the current status of preschool behavioral management practices and thus the need for professional development and support;
2. Build early educators' competence and confidence in facilitating children's social-emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors;
3. Promote social-emotional and behavioral health of preschoolers with challenging behaviors; and
4. Reduce the use of expulsion and suspension practices in early childhood settings.

#### Inclusion Criteria

- Programs that primarily serve children from low-income families.
- Programs that serve children from 2 to 6 years of age.

#### Study Procedure



#### • **Part 1: Descriptive Study**

- Administrator interview: 60 to 90 minutes.
- Teacher recruitment: 2 to 5 teachers--ideally teachers who need supports with managing behaviors or who have expelled or suspended children.
- Document sharing: documents related with behavioral incidental report, behavior management plan, etc.
- Teacher interviews: each interview lasts 60 to 90 minutes.
- Classroom observations: 2-hour TPOT observation and 30 minutes follow-up interview.

#### • **Part 2: Intervention Study**

- Teacher recruitment: 1 to 2 teachers who will participate in an intervention study. Ideally teachers who need supports with managing behaviors or who have expelled or suspended children.
- Teacher self-rating of confidence, stress, and likelihood of using expulsion and suspension practices: 15 to 30 minutes.
- Child recruitment: participating teachers will identify several children with challenging behaviors and contact their parents for consent.
- Teacher rating of participating child's social emotional development: 15 to 30 minutes.
- Teaching trainings: 2 to 3 teacher training sessions, each lasts 45 to 60 minutes.
- Teacher implementing trained strategies and researcher providing on-going coaching.
- The coaching will go on until participating teacher(s) meets implementation fidelity. It may last 1 to 3 months.
- Maintenance and generalization.
- Teacher self-rating of confidence, stress, and likelihood of using expulsion and suspension practices: 15 to 30 minutes.
- Teacher rating of participating child's social emotional development: 15 to 30 minutes.
- Teacher interview: 45 to 60 minutes.

#### **Benefits**

- For program
- For teacher
- For child
- For other programs and policy makers

#### **Risks**

- No anticipated risks

#### **Compensation**

- Program: \$300.00
- Teacher who participates in Part 1: \$25.00
- Teacher who participates in Part 2: \$100.00
- Child and Family: \$50.00
- Explain that compensation will be pro-rated if only participating in parts of the study.

#### **Consent Forms**

- Explain the consent procedure
- Administrator Consent
- Teacher Descriptive Study Consent
- Teacher Intervention Study Consent
- Parent/Guardian Consent

#### **Confirming Interest and/or Obtaining Consent**

- Contact information

## Appendix D: Teacher Recruitment Flier



# TEACHER PARTICIPANTS NEEDED!!

## FIVE THINGS YOU WANT TO KNOW ABOUT THIS STUDY

1. This study has one **aim**: supporting children (3 to 5 years old) with **Challenging Behaviors** via supporting teachers.
2. This study has three **purposes**:
  - a. understanding teachers' challenges and needs in the area of addressing challenging behaviors;
  - b. understanding preschool expulsion and suspension practices; and
  - c. using professional development (staff training and on-going support) to increase teachers' confidence and ability in addressing challenging behaviors.
3. This study has **TWO** parts. You can either participate in **Part 1 + Part 2** or just **Part 1**.
4. Your participation is **VOLUNTARY**!
5. We have a small amount of **compensation** for all our participants!

### Who Are We?

#### Zhe Gigi An

Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Special  
Education  
University of Kansas

#### Eva Horn

Professor  
Coordinator of Early  
Childhood Unified  
Program  
Department of Special  
Education  
University of Kansas

### How Will You be Involved in This Study?

|        | Activity                                     | Time Commitment                     |
|--------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Part 1 | Interview #1                                 | 60 to 90 minutes                    |
|        | Classroom Observation                        | 2 hours                             |
|        | Interview #2                                 | 20 to 30 minutes                    |
| Part 2 | Rating Scales Stage 1                        | 1.5 hours                           |
|        | Discussion of Professional Development Areas | 1 hour                              |
|        | Training                                     | Two to three 45-60 minutes sessions |
|        | Coaching                                     | One or two times every week         |
|        | Follow-ups                                   | 20 minutes every week               |
|        | Rating Scales Stage 2                        | 1.5 hours                           |
|        | Interview #3                                 | 60 to 90 minutes                    |

### If you decide to participate:

- Sign the consent form
- Return it to Gigi

THANK  
YOU!

### If you can't decide and need more information:

- Email or call us! We are willing to answer any questions.



(913)-535-6501

zhe.an.gigi@ku.edu



## **Appendix E: Documents to Request**

1. Documents collected through the program website:
  - Are these still current?
  - Have these changed?
2. Documents related to behavioral policies/plans/guidelines
3. Documents that describe policies on teacher-child ratio, classroom size, and length of school day;
4. Documents that describe the required qualifications for administrators, lead teachers, and other staff including education, experience, etc.
5. Documents that report numbers of expulsion and suspension. If possible, these numbers aggregated by child gender, race, and disability.
  - In-school suspension is an instance in which a child is temporarily removed from an on-going classroom activity/routine for disciplinary purposes to another room/space separate from where the activity/routine occurs.
  - Out-of-school suspension is an instance in which a child is temporarily removed from his/her regular program for disciplinary purposes to another settings (e.g., home, behavior center).
  - Expulsion is an instance in which a child is permanently removed from his/her regular program for disciplinary purposes to another setting (e.g., home, behavior center).
6. Materials that describe curriculums used particularly in the areas of social emotional competency, classroom management, and organizing learning environment
7. Documents that provide guidance on what teachers and programs will do in response to challenging behaviors (e.g., response, communication, consultation)
8. Documents that provide guidance of the use of expulsion and suspension practices
9. Documents that indicate plans for professional development
10. Family handbook
11. Anything else that you think is important for this study

## Appendix F: Administrator Demographic Information Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Race/Ethnicity (Choose more than one if needed):**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Native Alaskan | <input type="checkbox"/> Latino/Hispanic              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Pacific Islander            | <input type="checkbox"/> White, not Latino/Hispanic   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black, not Latino/Hispanic        | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |

**Current Professional Position/Title in Your School/Program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Highest Education Degree:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child Development Associate | <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Associate                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |

**If held, your college degree major:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teaching License/Certification:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Education            | <input type="checkbox"/> General Education + Special Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education            | <input type="checkbox"/> None                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |  |

**Other School Certification/Endorsement (e.g., ELL endorsement):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years of Teaching:** \_\_\_\_\_

**School Location:**

- |                                |                                   |                                |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Urban | <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban | <input type="checkbox"/> Rural |
|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|

**School Setting:**

- |   |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Non-Profit Center-Based Child Care Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> For-Profit Center-Based Child Care Program |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____               |

**No. of Currently Enrolled Students:** \_\_\_\_\_

**No. of Regular Staff:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Current Student Population (Age Group; Check All That Apply):**

- |                                       |                                       |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0-12 months  | <input type="checkbox"/> 12-24 months | <input type="checkbox"/> 24-36 months |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 36-60 months | <input type="checkbox"/> >60 months   |                                       |

**Current Student Population (Characteristics; Check All That Apply):**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typically Developing Children     | <input type="checkbox"/> English Language Learners    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children with IEP/IFSP            | <input type="checkbox"/> Children at Risk             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children from Low Income Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |

## **Appendix G: Administrator Interview Protocol**

### ***Background***

- Please share with me some about how and why you became an administrator.
- Please share some information about:
  - The program (e.g., philosophy)
  - Qualifications:
    - Administrator
    - Lead teachers
    - Other staff
  - Classrooms (e.g., no., teacher-child ratio, what are the age groupings of the classrooms)
  - Children (e.g., demographics)

### ***Topic 1: Young Children with Challenging Behaviors***

- Please provide some examples of the kinds of challenging behavior that your program has had to address. For example, how does it look like? How often does it happen?
- How are challenging behaviors recorded and documented?
- In your opinion, what are some of the reason that children may engage in challenging behaviors?

### ***Topic 2: Prevention of Challenging Behaviors***

- In your experiences, are there things that can be done to prevent challenging behaviors from happening? If so, what are strategies that can be used?
- Please describe prevention strategies that have been used in your program.
- What works and what does not work? How effective are the ones that work?

### ***Topic 3: Response to Challenging Behaviors***

- How do you expect classroom staff to respond when challenging behavior occurs, including as it happens and following the incidence?
- Does your program have written policies related to responding to or addressing challenging behaviors?
  - If yes, how were the policies developed (e.g., funder requirements, licensing requirements)?
  - What does the policy say specifically about responding to challenging behaviors?
  - Do you think the policy is effectively addressing the needs?
- What is the follow-up with children and families if suspension or expulsion is decided?

### ***Topic 4: Behavioral Intervention Strategies***

- Here are some widely used behavioral intervention strategies:
  - *Strategy 1:* When a child misbehaves, he/she is removed from an on-going classroom activity/routine to another spot/area in the SAME room/space (e.g., classroom, playground).
  - *Strategy 2:* When a child misbehaves, he/she is removed from an on-going activity/routine to another room/space SEPARATE from where the activity/routine occurs.
  - *Strategy 3:* A child who misbehaves is sent home temporally ranging from hours to several days.
  - *Strategy 4:* A child who misbehaves is permanently removed from the program.
- Does your program have policies or documents that guide the use of this strategy?

- Does your program use any of these strategies?
- Can you share your experiences with each of these strategies?
- How effective is each strategy? How do you define the effectiveness of this strategy?
  - For the child, family, classroom, and/or program?
- What would lead you to make the decision of using strategy 3 or 4?
- In the past six months, how many children have you used strategies 3 and 4 with?
- In the past six months, how many times have you used strategies 3 and 4?
- Are there patterns and/or variations in the use of strategies 3 and 4?

***Topic 5: Working with Families***

- What is the family involvement in addressing challenging behaviors?
- How do you address families of children with challenging behaviors?
- How do you communicate with families of affected and affecting children?
- Does your program have written policies related to communications with parents for expulsion and suspension?

***Topic 6: Challenges***

- Does your program have any challenges in preventing and/or addressing challenging behaviors? If yes, what are some of the challenges?
- Are you able to address those challenges? If yes, how do you address them?

***Topic 7: Support and Professional Development***

- What supports do you have available or access to for assisting your teachers in addressing children's challenging behaviors?
- What types of professional development opportunities would you like to be able to offer your teachers about social emotional development and challenging behaviors?

## Appendix H: Teacher Demographic Information Sheet

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Race/Ethnicity (Choose more than one if needed):**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> American Indian or Native Alaskan | <input type="checkbox"/> Latino/Hispanic              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Asian/Pacific Islander            | <input type="checkbox"/> White, not Latino/Hispanic   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Black, not Latino/Hispanic        | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |

**Current Professional Position/Title in Your School/Program:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Highest Education Degree:**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> High School                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Bachelor                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Child Development Associate | <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Associate                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |

**If held, your college degree major:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Teaching License/Certification:**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> General Education            | <input type="checkbox"/> General Education + Special Education |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Special Education            | <input type="checkbox"/> None                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |  |

**Other School Certification/Endorsement (e.g., ELL endorsement):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Years of Teaching:** \_\_\_\_\_

**No. of Currently Enrolled Students in Your Class:** \_\_\_\_\_

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> No. of Boys _____ | <input type="checkbox"/> No. of Girls _____ |
|--|---|

**No. of Regular Staff in Your Class (Please identify their roles):**

**Current Student Population in Your Class (Age Group; Check All That Apply):**

- |                                       |                                       |                                       |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0-12 months  | <input type="checkbox"/> 12-24 months | <input type="checkbox"/> 24-36 months |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 36-60 months | <input type="checkbox"/> >60 months   |                                       |

**Current Student Population in Your Class (Characteristics; Check All That Apply):**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Typically Developing Children     | <input type="checkbox"/> English Language Learners    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children with IEP/IFSP            | <input type="checkbox"/> Children at Risk             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Children from Low Income Families | <input type="checkbox"/> Others: Please specify _____ |

**Current Work Schedule (Check Days and Indicate Lengths)**

|         | <input type="checkbox"/> Monday | <input type="checkbox"/> Tuesday | <input type="checkbox"/> Wednesday | <input type="checkbox"/> Thursday | <input type="checkbox"/> Friday |
|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Lengths |                                 |                                  |                                    |                                   |                                 |

## **Appendix I: Teacher Interview Protocol**

### ***Experience Sharing***

- Please share with me how and why you became a teacher
- Please share some information about:
  - Your program
  - Your classroom (e.g., adults, teacher-child ratio, age grouping, size, lengths of day)
  - Children in your classroom (e.g., demographics)

### ***Topic 1: Young Children with Challenging Behaviors***

- Please provide some examples of the kinds of challenging behavior that you have had to address. For example, how does it look like? How often does it happen?
- How are challenging behaviors recorded and documented?
- In your opinion, what are some of the reason that children may engage in challenging behaviors?

### ***Topic 2: Prevention of Challenging Behaviors***

- In your experiences, are there things that can be done to prevent challenging behaviors from happening? If so, what are strategies that can be used?
- Please describe prevention strategies that have been used in your classroom.
- What works and what does not work? How effective are the ones that work?

### ***Topic 3: Response to Challenging Behaviors***

- How do you usually respond when challenging behavior occurs, including AS IT HAPPENS AND FOLLOWING THE INCIDENCE?
- Does your program have written policies related to responding to or addressing challenging behaviors?
  - If yes, how were the policies developed (e.g., funder requirements, licensing requirements)?
  - What does the policy say specifically about responding to challenging behaviors?
  - Do you think the policy is effectively addressing the needs?

### ***Topic 4: Behavioral Intervention Strategies***

- Here are some widely used behavioral intervention strategies:
  - *Strategy 1:* When a child misbehaves, he/she is removed from an on-going classroom activity/routine to another spot/area in the SAME room/space (e.g., classroom, playground).
  - *Strategy 2:* When a child misbehaves, he/she is removed from an on-going activity/routine to another room/space SEPARATE from where the activity/routine occurs.
  - *Strategy 3:* A child who misbehaves is sent home temporally ranging from hours to several days.
  - *Strategy 4:* A child who misbehaves is permanently removed from the program.
- Does your program have policies or documents that guide the use of these strategies?
- Do you use any of these strategies?
- Can you share your experiences with each of these strategies?
- How effective is each strategy? How do you define the effectiveness?
  - For the child, family, classroom, and/or program?

- What would lead you to make the decision of using strategy 3 or 4?
- In the past six months, how many children have you used strategies 3 and 4 with?
- In the past six months, how many times have you used strategies 3 and 4?
- Are there pattern and/or variations in the use of strategies 3 and 4?

***Topic 5: Working with Families***

- What is the family involvement in addressing challenging behaviors?
  - How do you handle when families are not as involved as expected?
- How do you address families of children with challenging behaviors?
- How do you communicate with families of affected and affecting children?
- Does your program have written policies related to communications with parents for expulsion and suspension?
- What is the follow-up with children and families if suspension or expulsion is decided?

***Topic 6: Challenges***

- Do you have any challenges in preventing and/or addressing challenging behaviors? If yes, what are your challenges?
- How does your program support you with these challenges?
- Does your program have any challenges in preventing and/or addressing challenging behaviors? If yes, what are some of the challenges?

***Topic 7: Support and Professional Development***

- What supports does your program provide to assist you in addressing challenging behaviors?
- What types of professional development opportunities would you like to better support you with promoting social emotional development and addressing challenging behaviors?

## Appendix J: An Example of TPOT Report

### The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) for Preschool Classrooms

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Teacher: _____ Observer: <u>Zhe Gigi An</u><br>Observation Date: _____ Observation Time: <u>8:48-10:48</u>   | <b>Red Flags</b>   |
| <p style="text-align: center; color: #4CAF50;"><b>What is the TPOT?</b></p> <p>The Teaching Pyramid Observation Tool (TPOT) is an instrument designed to measure teachers' implementation of teaching and behavior support practices for promoting social emotional competence children from 3 to 5 years old.</p>   | 15. The majority of the day is spent in teacher-direct activities<br>16. Transitions are more often chaotic than not<br>17. Teacher talk to children is primarily giving directions<br>18. During group activities, many children are not engaged<br>19. Teachers are not prepared for activities before the children arrive at the activity<br>20. Children are reprimanded for engaging in disruptive or problem behavior (frequent use of "no," "stop," "don't")<br>21. Children are threatened with an impending negative consequence that will occur if disruptive or problem persists<br>22. Teacher reprimands or admonishes children from expressing their emotions<br>23. Emotions are never discussed in the classroom<br>24. Teacher rarely encourages interactions between children during play or activities<br>25. Teacher gives directions to all children in the same way without giving additional help to children who need more support<br>26. Teacher tells children mostly what not to do rather than what to do<br>27. Learning centers do not have clear boundaries<br>28. There are large, wide-open spaces in the classroom where children can run<br>29. Teacher reports asking for the removal of children with persistent challenging behavior from the classroom or program<br>30. Teacher makes comments about families that are focused on the challenges presented by families and their lack of interest in being involved<br>31. Teacher restrains a child when engaging in problem behavior or secludes the child in an area separate from the classroom where the child cannot see the activities of the classroom |
| <p style="text-align: center; color: #4CAF50;"><b>What practices does the TPOT measure?</b></p> <p>The TPOT has three parts organized as subscales.</p> <p><b>Subscale 1</b> has 14 key teaching practice items (see report) derived from the Pyramid Model framework. The Pyramid Model is a multitiered framework that organizes empirically supported teaching practices for promoting social-emotional competence and addressing challenging behavior of preschool children.</p> <p>Observable indicators are organized under each key practice. The number of practice indicators associated with each item varies from 5 to 10. There are a total of 114 practice indicators in this part of the TPOT.</p> <p><b>Subscale 2</b> includes 17 red flags. Red flags are observable practices that are either counterproductive or not supportive of young children's social-emotional skills or are not appropriate prevention or intervention practices for addressing challenging behaviors. Red flags signal problematic practices in need of <u>immediate</u> attention.</p> <p><b>Subscale 3</b> is an item focused on using effective strategies to respond to challenging behavior. Challenging behavior is defined as behavior that includes physical aggression, destroying property, climbing on things that are not permitted, taking toys away from other children forcefully, running away, tantrum behaviors, verbal aggression, ordering an adult to do something, persistent or prolonged crying, inappropriate use of materials, and noncompliant statements.</p> <p>Subscale 3 includes three essential practices that teachers should use in response to incidences of challenging behavior.</p> | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <div style="background-color: #4CAF50; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px; text-align: center; width: 25%;"> <b>Subscale 1</b><br/>Key Teaching Practices         </div> <div style="background-color: #4CAF50; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px; text-align: center; width: 25%;"> <b>Subscale 2</b><br/>Red Flags         </div> <div style="background-color: #4CAF50; color: white; padding: 10px; border-radius: 10px; text-align: center; width: 25%;"> <b>Subscale 3</b><br/>Effective Behavioral Management Practices         </div> </div> <p><b>Note: No red flags observed in this classroom.</b></p>   |
| <p><b>Note:</b> This report is written to provide information about what practices are or are not being implemented in a classroom. The purpose of this report is not to evaluate, but to help identify some potential areas for professional developmental for the teacher to better support children's social emotional development.</p>   |  |



| % of indicators scored as "Yes"                                      | 10 | 20 | 30 | 40 | 50 | 60 | 70 | 80 | 90 | 100 | Commendations  | Recommendations   |
|--|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|--|---|
| 1. Schedules, routines, and activities                               |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Activities are well structured; 2. Balance between teacher-directed and child-led activities; 3. Use of visual schedules                        | Review the posted classroom schedule with children and refer to it throughout the day   |
| 2. Transitions between activities are appropriate                    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher supports children's transitions; 2. Transitions strategies are effective and engaging   | 1. Provide individualized instruction to children who struggle with transition; 2. Provide positive, descriptive feedback during transition |
| 3. Teachers engage in supportive conversations with children         |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher has positive, supportive, and brief conversations with children; 2. Teacher joins children's play and expand their interactions         | Provide positive AND descriptive feedback for children's skills, behaviors, and activities  |
| 4. Promoting children's engagement                                   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher provides developmentally appropriate activities to promote engagement; 2. Teacher assists children for engagement                       | Comment positively AND descriptively on children who are engaged in activities  |
| 5. Providing directions  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher uses simple and specific directions that tell children what to do rather than what not to do; 2. Teacher effectively redirects children | 1. Provide positive AND descriptive feedback; 2. Check in with children to make sure they understand directions.                            |
| 6. Collaborative teaming   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. All adults are engaged with children and appear to know their roles; 2. Interactions and conversations are positive and child-related.          | 1. Share roles and responsibilities between adults including providing instruction; 2. Give each other positive feedback                    |
| 7. Teaching behavior expectations                                    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher has posted classroom rules; 2. Posted rules are reviewed with children during large-group activities                                    | 1. Remind children of the posted rules throughout the day; 2. Link positive feedback and/or redirections to posted rules                    |
| 8. Teaching social emotional skills and emotional competencies       |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher uses natural opportunities and structured activities to teach social skills; 2. Teacher facilitates children's "working-together"       | 1. Model social skills and emotional competencies; 2. Help children reflect; 3. Provide positive and descriptive feedback                   |
| 9. Teaching friendship skills  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher uses a variety of strategies to teach friendship skills; 2. Teacher provides individualized assistance                                  | 1. Model friendship skills; 2. Help children reflect on friendship skills; 3. Support peers in helping their friends practice social skills |
| 10. Teaching children to express emotions                            |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teach emotion words and how to recognize emotions; 2. Validate children's emotions; 3. Provide strategies to calm down                          | 1. Model and label OWN emotions; 2. Individualize instruction on emotions based on children's needs   |
| 11. Teaching problem solving   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Support children with problem-solving in naturally occurring situations; 2. Engage children in generating solutions to problems                 | Teach and model problem solving STEPS: identify the problem; generate solutions; consider outcomes, try solutions, and evaluate             |
| 12. Interventions for children with persistent challenging behaviors |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |  | 1. Initiate functional assessment process for challenging behaviors; 2. Participate in developing and implementing behavioral plans         |
| 13. Connecting with families   |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     | 1. Teacher has frequent and positive communications with families; 2. Children's families are represented  | 1. Facilitate bidirectional communication with families; 2. Choose communication methods based on families' preferences                     |
| 14. Supporting families  |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |    |     |  | 1. Provide families with information on the importance of social-emotional development; 2. Provide strategies families can use at home      |

## **Appendix K: TPOT Summative Narratives**

### **Overall Scores**

#### **Subscale 1 Key Teaching Practices**

The lowest scored areas are:

- 14. Supporting family use of the pyramid model (0%)
- 12. Interventions for children with persistent challenging behavior (3%)
- 7. Teaching behavior expectations (6%)
- 8. Teaching social skills and emotional competencies (14%)
- 9. Teaching friendship skills (17.5%)

The highest scored areas are:

- 3. Supportive conversation with the child (64%):
  - Mostly acknowledging children's communication to him or her, calling children's name, having brief conversations, responding to child
  - Very few demonstrated extended or expanded conversations with child, or positive reinforcement, or individualized support with children who do not communicate verbally
- 6. Collaborative Teaming (60%)
- 2. Transitions (57%)
  - Mostly supporting transitions and giving whole class warning
  - Lacking teaching steps, individualization, and positive reinforcement
- 4. Engagement (55%)
  - Mostly providing general guidance, providing developmentally appropriate activities, and multiple choices
  - Lacking individualized support, positive reinforcement, and assisting children to engage in such activities
- Summary:
  - High score items indicate basic elements of Tier 1 support
  - However, areas in need of support include: individualized support, teaching alternative skills and social emotional competency, positive reinforcement, and higher level support.

#### **Subscale 2 Red Flags:**

- On average, teachers have 5.14 red flags ranging from 0 to 8.
- The only two red flags that were not observed were:
  - 17. Teacher talk to children is primarily giving directions, telling children what to do, reprimanding children; and
  - 22. Teacher reprimands or admonishes children for expressing their emotions.
- The red flags that occurred in over 40% of the classrooms include:
  - 24. Teacher rarely encourages interactions between children during play activities (86%);
  - 28. There are large, wide-open spaces in the classroom where children can run (57%);
  - 23. Emotions are never discussed in the classroom (57%);
  - 20. Children are reprimands for engaging in disruptive or problem behavior (frequent use of no, stop, don't; 57%);

- 21. Children are threatened with an impending negative consequence that will occur if disruptive or problem behavior persists (43%).
- **Subscale 3: Addressing individual behaviors:**
  - SCB3 (teacher provides positive attention or positive descriptive feedback to the child when the child begins behaving appropriately) was not observed or reported at all
  - SCB2 (teacher responds to children by stating the expected behavior in positive terms or providing instruction in an acceptable alternative behavior, 33%)
  - SCB1 (teacher implement developmentally appropriate strategies in response to challenging behavior, 67%)
  - A was not observed: when challenging behavior occurred, the child was reminded of posted behavior expectations or rules
  - B was observed in 67% of the classrooms: teacher responded to CB by stating a natural or logical consequence AND following through with stated actions
  - C was not observed: teacher provided support to children who were angry or upset by assisting them with problem solving related to the challenging behavior

### **Key Program Difference**

- **Bright Future Child Care** has higher scores in:
  - 1. Schedules, routines, and activities;
  - 2. Transitions;
  - 3. Supportive Conversations;
  - 4. Engagement;
  - 5. Providing Directions;
  - 7. Teaching Behavioral Expectations;
  - 8. Teaching social emotional skills and emotional competencies;
  - 9. Teaching friendship skills;
  - 10. Teaching children to express emotions;
  - 11. Teaching problem solving;
  - 13. Connecting with families
- **Bright Future Child Care** also has the lowest red flags with no red flags observed during one of the two observations. It is also the classroom where challenging behaviors were not observed.
- **All for One** has higher scores than the other two cases in:
  - 6. Collaborative Teaming
- **Lincoln Child Care Center** has the most red flags. The red flags that were observed in more than two classrooms were:
  - 16. Transitions are more often chaotic than not.
  - 20. Children are reprimands for engaging in disruptive or problem behavior (frequent use of no, stop, don't).
  - 21. Children are threatened with an impending negative consequence that will occur if disruptive or problem behavior persists.